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A Z A R I A N:

AN EPISODE.

BY

HARRIET ELIZABETH PRESCOTT,
AUTHOR OF "THE AMBER GODS," ETC.



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A Z A R I A N.

I.

LIFE, which slips us along like beads on a leash, strung summer after summer on Ruth Yetton's thread, yet none so bright as that one where the Azarian had pictured his sunny face and all his infinite variety of prank-some ways. Ruth's mother had thrown her up in despair, as good for nothing under the sun, but her father always took her on his knee at twilight, listened to her little idealities, and dreamed the hour away with her. Yet without the mother's constructive strength, all Ruth's inherited visioning would have availed her ill.

Perhaps it was owing to this scheming, but reverizing brain of his, that one day her father

sold his farm and moved with wife and child to the city. And when, after a while, all things went the reversed way with him there, the schemes suddenly ran riot in fever, and he became an old man in his prime. The mother, with all the quiet current of years disturbed, died then, of vexation perhaps. And Ruth Yetton was left more than alone, with a dear burden on her slender shoulders, and with no other relative whose great lodestone of race might draw her little magnet.

When the first bursts of grief had gathered themselves darkly inward, to suffuse all the days to come with silent rushes of gloom and sorrow, Ruth assumed her duties. In the first place, she counted their money; then, selecting sufficient furniture for some tiny kitchen or other, should she ever be able to hire two rooms, and a few articles of a different class, she hastened to dispose of the remainder,— quickly, lest, delaying, she would never have



the heart to sell them at all,—these things round which such memories clung. A lofty chest of drawers with burnished brasses, the old clock whose ponderous stroke had marked off all those dead and gone days, her father's chair, and one or two books of rare prints, were not to be parted with. All done, the accumulation in her purse seemed a great deal to little Ruth ; yet she knew it could not last forever, and she daily sought work. Gradually, as she paid the weekly board or bought some little pleasure for the sad and sweet old face in the corner, the purse began to drop an ever lighter weight in her pocket. One day, at last, she took the two books and went to a place at whose windows she had often stood to watch the storied wealth.

“No,” said the person she addressed. “You will probably receive a good price for this on Cornhill. We do not deal in such articles.” But as he idly turned it over, two little papers

slipped from between the leaves and fluttered to the floor. He gathered them. They were the old amusements of Ruth's careless leisure. One, the likeness of a bunch of gentians just plucked from the swampy mould, blue as heaven, their vapory tissue—as if a breath dissolved it—so tenderly curled and fringed like some radiate cloud, fragile, fresh, a creation of the earth's fairest finest effluence, dreams of innocence and morning still half veiled in their ineffable azure. The other, only a single piece of the wandering dog-tooth, with its sudden flamy blossom starting up from the languid stem like a serpent's head, full of fanged expression, and with its mottled leaf, so dewy, so dark, so cool, that it seemed to hold in itself the reflection of green-gloomed transparent streams running over pebbly bottoms.

The interlocutor examined them for a few moments steadily. “Your name, may I ask?”

“Ruth Yetton.”

“Has it ever occurred to you, Miss Yetton, to offer these sketches for sale ? ”

“Those ! ”

“I see not.”

“Are they — worth anything, sir ? ”

“Yes, decidedly. What price will you put upon them ? ”

“Is — a dollar — half a dollar — too much ? ”

“I will mark them three. They might bring five. You can call again in a few days, Miss Yetton, and if they are gone we will hand you the proceeds, deducting a small commission. You would find ready sale, I believe, for as many as you could furnish.”

What visions danced over Miss Yetton’s pale little face as she remembered the overflowing desk in her trunk. Hunger and want and fear annihilated. Soup and sirloin every day for the uncomplaining old man at home, new clothes for him, fragrantest tobacco,

trivial luxuries, now and then a ride outside the suburbs, now and then an evening at the play, comfort and rest and safety and pleasure all the days and nights of his mortal life. That moment paid for so much. Wealth rose round her like an exhalation; another possibility flashed upon her and faded,—she was half-way to Italy, tossing on the blue sea, hastening to pictures and shrines and eternal summer.

The lounger over Rosa Bonheur's portfolio turned and fastened his glance upon her; she seemed to feel it, though she was not looking, for it entered her as a sunbeam parts the petals of a flower.

The shopman smiled at her roseate countenance.

"Very well," said he. "I see that we have struck a vein!" and she tripped away.

So three months' time saw many things altered. Little gold-pieces clinked, and pre-

cious paper rustled, in Miss Yetton's wallet, and she had left the new devotion of land-lady and fellow-lodgers running to waste, having found two rooms, in an airier place, that pleased her fancy. They were part of a house that stood on the corner of a large, empty square, seldom reached by the hum of business; and as the house was old, and had none of the modern alleviations of life, they were obtained very reasonably. On the second floor, with one large window for the sunshine and one for the square, with a little carpet pieced out by the cheap Arab mat whose vivid elm-leaf hue seemed like perpetual fair weather in the room, with the great chest of drawers reaching in ancestral splendor almost to the ceiling, with the home sound of the clock, sentinel in the recess, the little work-table, one window full of flowers in pots and boxes and baskets, a portrait of some sad-eyed lady which she had found exposed in an

auction-room, and about which she loved to weave pathetic romances, two yellow old engravings from Angelica Kauffmann, where figured Fancy with the wings springing from her filleted temples; a lounge of her own fashioning, piled with purple cushions, and which became a very comfortable bed at night; with a glowing fire in the grate, and a little cat purring before it,—Miss Yetton could hardly devise the imagination of further comfort. Their dinners they found in any restaurant, their breakfasts were a pleasure to contrive. They took long trips on the horse-cars, which were the old father's delight; long rides then into the wintry country, got out at any prospect of field or wood, and returned laden with trailers of gray moss, with clusters of scarlet hips, with withered ferns, blue juniper-berries, dried cones, bunches of beautiful brown-bearded grasses, which, disposed here and there, tasselled over the dark wood of the

picture-frames, or, set in tapering glasses, kept her sitting-room always sweetly ornamented, till in summer she could make it a very bower with all manner of flaunting herb or shrinking bud, with great boughs of the snowy medlar, and with long wreaths of the spiced sweet-brier. Whenever, too, Miss Yetton had a cent that she could religiously spare,—for besides her little savings she had her little charities,—she stole with it between the lofty ranks of some greenhouse and won the gardener's heart, and brought back threefold its worth to lay massed in gorgeous bloom about the room; while her ever passive companion sat, lost in a bewildered enchantment, among all the glowing greenery, the springing stems and bending buds whose life leaped up so riotously to break in blossom,—sat abandoned to the soft damp warmth of atmosphere that was like some other planet's,—sat there in the emeraldine lustre that, filtering through

the vine-leaved roof, seemed to have dripped a shining sediment in great bunches of translucent grapes,—thrilled through all his sense, and growing ever rapt and paler, till the child hurried him away lest his soul should exhale entirely in the strange region of heavily-freighted air, and be lost among all its other ecstatic odors. Sometimes moreover, of an afternoon, she slipped with the quiet old man into an orchestra-concert; and afterwards the dim dreamwork and sweet thoughts that had been invoked by the murmuring music shaped themselves to tint and color and design as she walked round the Common in the sunset, or went out and leaned a moment over the arches of the bridges, and marked how the green light fell like damp sunshine among their shadows. Few of all those who on their rambles were wont with interest to encounter this little woman supporting the spiritual, frail form beside her, associated the two in any

measure with the beautiful creations of pencil and paper that at that very moment perhaps they treasured in their hand. It is true that often in the after-dark hours she ached to have her father's old intelligence back among these pleasures, to feel once more the old reliance on his omnipotence, to have her mother sharing these long-desired comforts; but when the feverish pain was by, with her constant work, with her pleasant fancies, with her brightening hopes and joyful attainment, Miss Yetton was as happy a little maid as a city roof can cover.

Without premeditation or affectation or search, Miss Yetton had found an art. An art in which she stood almost alone. As she began to give herself rules, one that she found absolute was to work from nothing but the life. During the winter, and while yet her means were very small, the opposite course had been needful; but even then some little

card where a handful of brown stems and ruddy berries from the snowy roadside seemed to have been thrown, or where she had caught just the topmost tips of the bare tree in the square, lined like any evanescent sea-moss, delicate as the threads of smoke that wander upward, faintly tinged in rosy purple and etched upon a calm deep sky with most exquisite and intricate entanglement of swinging spray and swelling bud,—even then things like these commanded twice the price of any copy of her past sketches. Something of this was due to growth perhaps. Already she felt that she handled her pencil with a swifter decision, and there was courage in her color. But when spring came she revelled. She took jaunts deeper and deeper among the outlying regions. One day, luncheon in pocket, she went pulling apart old fallen twigs and bits of stone on the edge of a chasm where dark and slumbrous waters forever mantled, and

returning the forty miles in the afternoon train brought home with her bountiful bunches, root and blood-red leaf, downy bud and flaky flower of the purple hepatica,—the hepatica, whose pristine element, floating out of heaven and sinking into the sod with every star-sown fall of snow, answers the first touch of wooing sunshine, assoiled of dazzle, enriched with some tincture of the mould's own strain, and borrowing from the crumbling granites that companion it all winter an atom of fibre, a moment of permanence: breezy bits of gold and purple at last, cuddled in among old gnarls and roots, and calling the wild March sponsor. These before her, she wrought patiently on ivory with all delicate veinery and tender tint, painting in a glossy jet of background, till, rivalling the Florentine, the dainty mosaic was ready for the cunning goldsmith who should shape it to the pin that gathers the laces deep in ahy lady's bosom. Then,

when the brush had extracted their last essence, some messenger of the year, some little stir in her pulse, warned her of hurrying May-flowers, and she sped down to the Plymouth woods, within sound of their rustling sea-shore, to pull up clustered wet trailing masses, flushed in warmest wealthiest pink with the heartsomest flower that blows. And there, in the milder weather, she took her only familiar, that he might plunge his trembling hands deep down among the flowers, or, sitting on a mossy knoll, listen to the wild song of the pines above. Sometimes too she stood with him through long reveries in the wide rhodora marshes, where some fleece of burning mist seemed to be fallen and caught and tangled in countless filaments upon the bare twigs and sprays that lovingly detained it. At other times she lingered over the blushing wild-honeysuckle, and every tube of fragrance poured strength and light into

her spirit. Always in gathering her trophies from among their natural surroundings she felt half her picture painted. Near the city there were fair gardens which she knew, and which in return for her homage gave her the sweet-pea, fluttering, balancing, tiptoe-fine, and pansies for remembrance; while in the farmers' orchards great broken boughs were put at the service of the young girl with the happy old man upon her arm. Then came a book of tree-blossoms,—those glad things that are in such haste to crowd into light and air before the leaves can get chance to burst their shining scales,—where the faint green vapor of the elm, the callow cloud that floats about the oak, the red flame of the maple, the golden, dusty tassels of the willow,—brimmed with being, whose very perfume seemed shaken about themselves on the paper,—hedged in with their wildness those caught and captive beauties but half tamed with

all the years, the fair fruit-flowers, ever a sweeter surprise that their frail petals wreath such rugged boughs,— the pear rivalling the cornel, the cherry like a suspended snowstorm that has caught life among the branches, the apple veined finely as the blush on any cheek, with its twisted stem where the aged lichens have laid their shield, the peach, like some splendid orchid, in its fantastic shape, with lifted wings, yet clinging to the bough, and full of a deep rich rosiness that already holds the luscious juices and voluptuous savor of the perfected growth, not without a hint of the subtly sweet poison in its heart. Then Miss Yetton busied herself over a set of book-marks with a wild-flower for every day of the year, half of April filled with violets, white and blue, the Alpine pedate, and the bright roadside freak of the golden-yellow, while for love she slipped among them that other, an atom of summer midnight, double, says some

one, as a little rose, the only blue rose we shall ever have; and for the days whereon no blossom burst, she had a tip of tiny hemlock cones, the moss from an old stone, a bunch of berries forsaken by the birds, some silky seedling unstripped of the rude breezes. In all these treasures there was no flaw; the harebell shaking in the wind and tangled among its grasses, the wild rose whose root so few rains had washed that there had settled a deep color in its cup, the cardinal with the very glitter of the stream it loves meshed like a silver mist behind its scarlet sheen, those slipshod little anemones that cannot stop to count their petals, but take one from their neighbor or leave another behind them, all the tiny stellate things wherein the constant crystallic force of the ancient earth steals into light, the radiant water-lily,—these held no dead pressed beauty, but the very spirit and springing life of the flower. Upon them,

too, she lavished fancy; among the sprays little hands appeared to help the climbing vine, here a humming-bird and a scarlet rock-columbine seemed taking flight together, there a wasp with the purple enamel of armor on his wing tilted against some burly husband-man of a bee to seek the good graces of the hooded nymph in an arethusa;—they were little gems, and brought the price of gems. At length, when—summer ended, and her tramps among pastures on fire with their burning huckleberry-bushes just begun — there came an order from across the seas for a book of autumn leaves, accompanied by a check for two hundred dollars, Miss Yetton thought her fortune made.

She was sitting at work on this order, one afternoon while her father slept, and with a new friend beside her. This friend had not long since made her acquaintance, and there had sprung up between them one of those

sudden intimacies which may happen to people who have long desired and needed them, and who are complementary each to the other.

“I am a poor little actress,” said Charmian; “poor, I suppose, as you can be. I do not have a great deal of money, but I do not spend all I have. I lay up a trifle for the rainy days, and I have squandered some on certain water-colors. I do not mean to squander any more, because now I shall have you, water-colors and all, and if ever you find yourself quite alone in the breathing world you are to come and paint in my sitting-room, or else I shall move, bag and baggage, and con my parts in yours.”

So it was arranged. Charmian was exactly what she said, a poor little actress, yet a very good one; no star, but one who played either Juliet or Lady Macbeth on occasion, by the best light that was in her; at some day, perhaps, a sudden inflorescence of charac-

ter might take place, and she would dazzle the world of footlights pale. She felt the possibility ever stirring within her,—it made her restive and bold; but to-day she was a poor little actress with a steady engagement.

Miss Yetton sat working in the black, lustrous berries, among the carbuncle splendors of the tupelo branch. Charmian was furbishing Kate Percy's bodice that it might do no dishonor to Ophelia's petticoat, and as they wrought, their tongues ran merrily. At length Charmian folded her work and rose, and, going, uttered the sentence that sealed little Ruth Yetton's fate.

"I'm not in the afterpiece to-night," said she, "so I shall be out at nine, and I'm going to bring Constant Azarian to see you."

"Constant Azarian?"

"Yes. He says he used to know you, and now your things are quite the rage, you see, he'd like to know you again. Patronage is

his cue. He made much of me at my *début*, thinking I would shortly extinguish Rachel. Rachel yet burns,— and like a chiselled flame ! I hardly met his expectations, but we've always been on good terms."

" Constant Azarian ! "

" Oh, so you remember him ? That's bad, or good,— tell me which ! Really I don't know whether to bring him here or not. He is such an impostor, so perfectly charming outside — and inside,— but there is no inside ; he is as shining and as hollow as a glass bubble."

" Oh,— no."

" I must n't bring him."

" Yes, do. I thought he could not be here or he would have found us out. I used to be fond of him one summer when we were children. I should like to see him."

" What if he should ever lay hands on our friendship, Ruth ? "

"He?" said Ruth looking up with wondering eyes, "why, it is no affair of his."

"Aha! well—I don't know. However, expect us at nine, and I should so like a cup of hot tea at that innocent hour. Stop, I must talk to you a bit. All the girls in town, I hear, rave over Azarian, though he's no match, for his father died not long ago and left him poor. It was a great flash-in-the-pan. Azarian had been lapped in luxury, and expected an inheritance. However, he behaved very well. He has some talent, he'd have gone on the stage, his name alone would draw good houses for a fortnight and have given him a pretty pocket-piece, but of course he couldn't rival Booth, and anything less is plebeian; he has written a farce or two, and there are dark hints of a tragedy. Then he has sculptured a little; he had patience to get through the clay, and money to get through the plaster, but not genius enough to get

through the marble ; there 's his great head still half in the block. Then he has painted a little,—portraits ; but they are horrible ; a brush like a scalpel, it lays people bare to the core ; to look at one of his canvases is like standing in a dissecting-chamber, where the knife has gored a gash down some face and laid open all the nerves and muscles ; every one's hidden sin suddenly flares up and glares at him. Nobody likes to be excoriated in that style ; so Azarian's portraits don't pay. Meantime, he was all along a student of medicine, and is now established in a city practice. So. There you have him. Sooner lose your heart to Fra Diavolo. Be warned. Be armed. Good by."

Little Miss Yetton laughed to herself as Charmian closed the door behind her ; she remembered the boy so well, or her ideal of the boy, who had come in his black clothes to spend a summer on the farm and to lose

his cough. She staid so long with suspended pencil, dreaming over that season, that the dark had fallen and the branch before her begun to fade ere she bethought herself of work. But her father, busying himself at the grate, startled her with a clatter of coal-scuttle and tongs, and she rose and swept her pretty litter aside.

As the great clock struck nine in the distance that evening, the long procession of its sounds issuing on the air with a measured tread, Miss Yetton piled the coke on her coals for a dancing cheer of the blaze of molten sapphire and opal, her little tea-table glittered in a corner, and as she glanced now and then toward the door there was an unwonted sparkle in her eye and a restless red on the pale cheek.

They came in laughing. Miss Yetton did not see Charmian, for the other stepped directly toward her, and, bowing, uttered his name.

“ Constantine Azarian.”

Her hand just brushed across his palm. He tossed his head with a motion that threw back the golden curls. “ You don’t meet me now as then,” he said.

“ Come,” said Charmian, who had doffed her things; “ none of your old times! To business. To my cup of tea, and then to your health.”

“ It is Constantine, father,” said Miss Yetton to the old gentleman, who did not at all comprehend the unusual proceedings, and forced to a familiarity which she would not have chosen; “ you remember Constant? ”

“ Yes,—yes,” replied her father uneasily. “ Why, you’re quite a man, sir! ”

The guest laughed, exchanged with him a sentence or two, then slipped over to the others.

“ So, Ruth, I have found you at last. Where have you been hiding? ” he demanded, seating himself, and perfectly at home in the minute.

"We have been here a long while. Up and down. A year in this house," she answered quietly.

Her tone nettled him, he raised his eyebrows. "Come, you want your tea," he said, fixing his glance coolly on Charmian.

"Yes, I want my tea, it prevents reaction after action. But that need n't hinder your conversation. Did you say your search for Ruth was severe?" she asked in mischievous demi-voice.

"No. Why should it have been?"

"Why, indeed?" said she, provoked with herself, while the red burned into Ruth's cheek.

"Ruth and I are such dear old friends that she should have written to me long ago. Why did n't you, Ruth?"

Blushing and smiling, appeased and pleased, Ruth passed him his cup without reply. It was a quaint little cup, a bit of translucent

gorgeousness that she had reproduced from the depths of her trunk and nicely washed that very evening.

Charmian arrested her arm. "Allow me to ask, Ruth Yetton," said she, "where you came across that hideous little splendor,—old china worth its weight in gold. Perhaps you painted it yourself. You have n't been expending your treasure to delectate Azarian's lips in that style?"

"Pardon, bella donna," said Azarian, securing the disputed object, "it is mine of old, the viaduct of youthful draughts. I drank from it every day of one summer. And you have kept it all this time, Ruth?"

Ruth's little heart leaped that he should have remembered it, she could not have answered why; she carried her father his tray and came back with rosy cheek and dewy eyes.

"Your tea is mercy itself, Ruth. It puts the spirit into one."

“A work of supererogation, madonna.”

“It is very nice tea, it was given to me,—because one cannot buy it; you would hardly suppose that it was made from flowers,” said Ruth.

“It looks as though it were strained through sunshine,” replied Azarian.

“The quality of mercy is not strained,” interpolated Charmian.

“Shop!” said Azarian.

“O yes,—shop, I dare say. What of that? Now, Azarian, tell the truth and shame the —; confess that you think it would be splendid to be famous, while Ruth there thinks it horrible to be infamous: but as for me”—

“Give you liberty or give you death.”

“As for me,—it’s very nice to be just unfamous; and I hope the time will never come when I shall be too great and dignified, and too full of sacred genius, to make little jokes

about the play, or to pass the butter in a tragic way. So much for shop!"

"No danger," said Azarian, with mournfully exaggerated eyebrows. "You are my great disappointment."

"Go along with you! What a plague you are! Here's to your confusion. Ach, ach!" ejaculated Charmian, drinking fast, as if she would rinse her mouth, "how sick I am of Portia with her ridiculously unjust justice, the impostress! Ach!"

"I don't think you'll be cast for Juliet again immediately. You made that botch of it purposely, last evening?"

"And to-morrow night I'm tamed for the shrew."

"I know no better subject."

"It's another abominable piece of business! Just a burlesque of the truth, though,—the very truth. It's the way of the world, the way of a man with a maid. What are we

better than any other clay,—only to tread on,—trample away then! ”

“ All in character. It is the role of Miss Ann Thrope. This tea, that is made of flowers, inverses Cowper,—inebriates, but not cheers, I fancy.”

“ Azarian, unless you conduct with more propriety, you shall go home directly, and I will never bring you again! ”

“ I can come next time alone,” he said, getting up to saunter about the room and examine the pictures ; till, possessing himself finally of Ruth’s portfolios, and taking a seat by her father, he went over them all, listening to the story of each sheet from the old lips delighted to part in recital.

“ He will have more deference to Charmian’s opinions when she returns from her southern tour ; for —— I am going away, Ruth.”

“ You are going away ? ”

“ Yes : the contract, as tragical factotum

and general maid of all work, was signed, sealed, and delivered to-day, since I left you."

"O, Charmian, what shall I do?"

"Do without me. If you won't come with me. What say, Ruth? I should so like to make you and Mr. Yetton my guests on the journey!"

"O, it is impossible!"

"I don't see why."

"But it is so, all the same."

"Ruth, dear, reconsider it. You renounce pride, or I content? I shall never, never desire more happiness than to do finely in my art and have you with me wherever I go."

"Nor I; but it can't be now, you know. Will this last long?"

"No, only a month or two. It is literally a golden opportunity. But in those regal Southern cities they love the drama! Dear rabble! How can any latent genius develop in such a searching wind of criticism as—

as *he* breathes, for instance? There, in the warm welcoming weather, the coaxing encouraging air, the generous permeating sunshine, the fiery favor and love, one's very soul blossoms. I feel it in me, Ruth,— those tropical nights, those passionate plaudits, will make a great actress of me."

"I have no doubt they will. I can spare you for that."

"It would please you, Ruth?"

"More than you."

"I don't know. I'm not so unselfish,— fame is the flower and fruit of that divine inner impulsion at whose first stir one desires it. Yet I like, too, to do honor to our friendship, Ruth."

"Ruth," interrupted Azarian, pausing here over one of her arabesques, "where did you get these little wingèd faces?"

"O, detached studies of Reynolds's cherubs, you remember,— except — one or two."

“And those?”

“My little cat sat for.”

“Naughty girl! You have never seen any Angelicos?”

“No.”

“I will take you to-morrow to some glorious things,—copies, yet delights.”

“You need n’t be taken unless you wish,” whispered Charmian.

“Ah, but I do! Nothing could give me such pleasure. I have even dreamed about them. And once—when I was in great perplexity, you know—I dreamed I was laboring through an interminable field of stubble, and two Angels came, with great rosy half-mooned wings, and lifted me by the shoulders and bore me swiftly over it all. And they must have looked precisely like Fra Angelicos,” said Ruth, her face all lighted.

“You can certify them to-morrow,” he replied, gazing at her admiringly.

"Azarian! Won't you take me too?"

"Well,—you can come," he answered, laughing. "Shall you be free at eleven, Ruth?"

"No, she won't. That is during my rehearsal-hour."

"Charmian will be through by twelve, though," said Ruth timidly.

"Very well, I will call for you then." Which accordingly he did.

Charmian went too, as she had threatened, not for her own enjoyment primarily, but she had some dim idea of playing dragon. Moreover, she was accustomed, by a sort of satire, to keep Ruth's enthusiasms an atom in check.

"They look like so many wooden dolls," said she, when Ruth stood rapt. "See their round poll,—the beady eyes of them!—their pink cheeks;—just a huddle of dolls."

"Is that St. John up there? the beautiful angel in the red gown, with that bright warm

hair curling over his shoulders, and his head bent so lovingly down on the little violin? I can hear the music! And see that St. Cecilia,—a blaze of blue in the midst of a blaze of gold. It is the very ecstasy of worship."

As Ruth spoke, low-voiced, Azarian, directly before her, was looking in her face; suddenly her eye caught his and fell; it was a moment of double consciousness. Azarian felt as if he had spoken his thoughts. He had only wondered why he had not known it was she when he saw her that first day in the print-shop as he lounged over Rosa Bonheur's lithographs, why he had not spoken to her then, why he had not thought her pretty then: she had a certain odd and dainty beauty of her own, those delicate features, dark eyes, and the one great wave in her less dark hair; she was quite petite and perfect; when there was any red in her cheek

it was not the blush of the rose, but the purple pink of the rhodora. And with her talent, too. He had met no one like her. What gave her glance that flashing fall just then? Was *she* going to care for him, too? That must n't be. Azarian, somewhat silent and distraught, went home that day in an uneasy frame.

As for little Ruth, she feared she had offended him. She conjectured concerning it too much for her comfort, and her heart gave a bound the next day when he tapped and immediately entered,—for Azarian's impetuosity, when he allowed it any play, enforced an entire want of ceremony, and just for the nonce he was so innocent of self-scrutiny as to forget consideration of why it was that he came at all,—for sometimes destiny takes even our predetermination out of our hand and weaves another figure,—the fact being only that he had felt as if he should like to see her.

"Good morning, little Elderberry," said he.

"Good morning," said she, rising and taking his hand. "Come and sit down here and see if my work is good. Father will be in directly; he is only walking round the square." And she resumed her occupation. "Why do you call me an elderberry?" she said at last, as he watched her.

"Why? only that you remind me of one; of a whole panicle of them rather. They are so tiny, so shining, so polished and perfect. The tint is so unique,—your dress suggests it to-day, black, and deep rich amaranth,—there is a spark of something like it in your eyes, and you have the stain of such juice just now on your cheek; then your lips are perhaps darker than other lips, like a black-heart cherry, which has the bitter-sweet elderberry flavor, too,—if one tastes it,—and those little pearls when you laugh, as at this moment, give them yet a wealthier hue. Yes,

you are one of the last drops of the earth's color and pungency distilled back again to the sunshine, and I've no doubt that at some time a bitter-sweet wine, hardly to be told from old red ripened port, will be expressed from your nature, strong enough to turn a man's head."

"O that will do," said Miss Yetton, laughing, and too utterly unaccustomed to the society of gentlemen to know whether to repulse this familiarity or not.

"Don't be offended. Remember that I am a portrait-painter," —

"Certainly. So I see a thousand reasons why this picture is my likeness, though you didn't paint it," and she brought up from among her scraps a drawing of the plant in question.

"There are a thousand more reasons why *this* is," said Azarian, unwrapping a parcel in his hand,—and he laid before her one of

those exquisite little tablets where on a cloud
an Angel strays singing from the Divine pres-
ence.

“I have had it a long while. It is like
those you saw yesterday, a copy from Fra
Angelico. See that robe, how it just seems
to be curdled together out of the soft purple
air. What a song the beautiful face is. It
is yours.”

“Mine!” Ruth hesitated, not because she
dreamed of any impropriety in accepting it,—
she had retaken her old childish feeling about
him,— but it seemed to her too valuable.
“No, no,” said she, “it is not mine, but if
you had really as lief, I would like to hang
it on the wall and have it a little while to
look at.”

“Forever. I shall never reclaim it. But
I should prefer you to accept it from me,
Ruth, and to thank me.”

“I do thank you.”

“Truly?” with his head resting on his hand and his arm along the table for a while.
“How came you to know—Charmian?”

“O, she ran up behind me, one day, on the Common, and she has been very kind to me ever since. She is the only friend I have,—except yourself. I like her very much,—don’t you?”

“So, so. She is—I beg your pardon—just a mite vulgar.”

Poor little Ruth! she had seen so few people that she did not know how that terrible word applied itself. Her friend’s peculiarities she had taken to be points of character, and had never suffered them to offend her.

“Moreover, she is a charmer,” quoted Azarian, half to himself, “and can almost read the thoughts of people.”

“I like her,—I love her!” was all Ruth ventured to say.

“The more ’s the pity,” replied the other,—

for there lingered, with all his froth of friendliness, a certain rancor in his soul because this same Charmian had at an earlier date seen fit to afford him very decided discouragement, and as a soothing lotion to his self-regard he had been obliged to conjure about her this phantasm of vulgarity,—a woman of refinement could not have resisted his power. In very truth, the two were antipathetical, though he had failed to perceive it at first; but her coldness had affected merely his fancy, and to-day Azarian's dislike was as sincere an emotion as he was capable of feeling.

“ Well, well,” said he, shaking off his cloud, “ have you ever seen her play? I should think that might cure you. Once or twice? We ’ll make it thrice, and go to-night then.”

“ I am much obliged to you. I should have gone oftener, but you know I do not like to leave my father.”

"Ah, little beggar," said Azarian gayly, catching her hands and laughing, "we'll take the father too!"

The rose burned in Ruth's cheek, and her eyes lighted him along his way with joyful thanks.

Azarian, being well pleased with himself, repeated the experiment of the play. Too prominent a personage in his own circle to enter a local theatre without notice, more glances than one had been directed at his companions,—at the frail loveliness of the old man's face, the silver locks floating round it from under the little black velvet cap,—at the quaint picturesqueness of the girl, with a something alien, a strange element that, just as you found her beautiful, presented itself and absorbed the possibility, and, trying to seize its volatile mystery, escaped beneath your gaze,—the subtle writing, the braided har-

mony of feature, the self-involution of genius. One or two of the players, with all of whom he was on terms of good-fellowship, came glancing through the side-scenes, on the first night, and wondered what little piece Azarian had picked up now. Opera-glasses were levelled, bows were interchanged, fair fingers and glancing fans vainly beckoned, on the next. Half a dozen of his acquaintance found important reasons for joining him a moment in the interludes, to retire and pronounce his friends to be foreigners, as no introductions had followed. And when, at the play's conclusion, they resorted to Vergne's and waited for their escaloped oysters, the place became thronged in such a manner as to cause the poor young maiden at the desk to lose her reckoning and her wits altogether. This was by no means offensive to Azarian; he was well accustomed to pursuit, and to that rather frank love-making in which the younger damsels of

America excel ; he had been the recipient of tri-cornered notes by the mail-ful, of bouquets with a well-known ring among the flowers, and had even been waylaid in the halls of his hotel for a lock of hair,—all which was beneath contempt; moreover, ladies of grace and wit and courtesy and piquant reserves had unbent to him as to no other; he knew well now that not one of them would leave their luxurious homes to share his life of possible struggle, had he ever intended to ask them, and he took a somewhat malicious pleasure in exciting their interest anew, and in baffling the other sex as well with his little incognita. The delicate titillation applied to his hidden vanity made him superb. Charmian, at another table, sat back in her chair with grim irony, but Azarian shone. He was sure of dozens of dancing eyes, from the other seats, from the gallery; he slipped to Charmian's side and asked her audibly would

she not come and see his friends, which she declined for that time ; he had a gay sentence for every one that passed him, he expended his skill and tact in keeping them all in the dark. And meanwhile the old father looked eagerly on what seemed to him so bright a scene, musing with dreamy pleasure over the gay and brilliant world. And in the intoxicating light, the perfumes of dying flowers, the splash of the little fountain, drawn to depend on him through her timidity, Ruth sat unconscious of the coil, sat under the influence of Azarian's sweet and subtle smiles, the object of all his careless grace, beaming back upon him out of beautiful happy eyes.

Azarian was capable of that air which puts all questioning to the right-about ; he enjoyed the little mystery among his acquaintance, he said so to himself, and doubtless thought, indeed, that was his only reason for meeting Ruth upon her walks and turning them into

longer and more public strolls, where he bent to her voice devotedly, met her serious upcast eyes with steady gaze, and inspired in her a confidence, a reliance, and an association of himself with purity, integrity, philosophy, and strength. Not that he had the first intention of inspiring any such confidence, any such association; he would have laughed at the idea, for he knew himself much better than Ruth did, after all, and often made a note of his various weaknesses,—indeed, making such note was one of his strong points. But Miss Yetton, like many another woman, saw in this man not what he had, but what she needed,—and as for him, clear as his sight was, and shallow as his nature, the one failed to penetrate the other,—for he thought he amused himself.

Ruth was still working on the order for the autumn leaves. Almost every other day she had gone out into the country, and almost

every other day Azarian had gone with her, now together in the cars, now, since superiority of strength is one of the surest attractions, driving her behind a high-stepping horse that brought his physical powers well into play,—for her father of late was less and less inclined to go, and Azarian always followed up his fancies closely. Sometimes, indeed, as they went across the Common, a leaf fluttered into her hand, whose peer no forest could produce, and towards whose curiously flecked and painted beauty the whole ripening year seemed to have converged; but oftener they went into a maze of woodland, where the dew-drops still glittered on all the splendid points of color, where the hills wrapped themselves far off in blue mist, and only some giant rose seemed to blossom at their skirts and seal them from entirely fading and dissolving into dreams. Together the two wandered down lanes all aglow with

the pendent jewels of the barberry-bushes, as it were a very Aladdin's garden ; they rested with the light flickering over them through ruby domes of oak, they stood to watch some golden beech intensify the sunshine, they broke down maple-branches with every leaf dancing on its separate stem like a tongue of fluttering fire and casting off a flock of scarlet shadows, they pictured the desert-edge beneath some beam of sunset when the wild sumachs tossed their crimson boughs like palms, they sat down at length under majestic hemlocks where a wild vine twisted itself among the knolls as a gorgeously freaked and freckled snake might do. All the ripe earth beneath the last touch of the burnishing sunshine, all the sweet rich air, full of its mild decay, all the fulfilled expression of the year, the peace, the pause, breathed only hope about the one and a soft regret about the other.

"These hemlocks always put me in mind of some long-forgotten time of innocence and freshness," said Azarian. "Perhaps of that when I first met you, Ruth."

"Do you remember that time?" asked Ruth, swinging her leaves, and looking off into the horizon.

"I have one of those accursed memories that never lose anything. Probably I can recall a hundred incidents that you lost the next day."

Ruth laughed incredulousness.

"How pretty somebody is when she laughs! Are you happy, Ruth?"

Ruth nodded.

"Let me see. What a little monster I was then,—but you believed in me, you thought I was Grand Chevalier of the White and Black Eagle. Let me see. Somebody was calling Ruth, were n't they? I can read that morning off as if it were a page. Don't you want to hear it?"

Ruth nodded again.

"I was a bright-faced boy then, an hour ago arrived. Somebody told me to keep the sun in my eyes and I'd find you. So the boy started at a run; but the fields were empty of all save the summer hum of full July, and by and by his pace slackened, till at length he stood silently gazing up into the brilliant sky and unconsciously allowing all the blithe fresh forenoon influences to touch him. Suddenly two wide wings, two quivering lines of shadow, trembled across his vision. Up went hat and heels in hot pursuit. A strange thing, with vivid life flashing through its shining dyes, all barred and mottled in garnet lights and diamond dust, blown to that pasture-land on the wind sweeping up from richer zones, a bubble of rays and prisms, frail as resplendent. Odd that I should treasure that butterfly, when men and women have died and left no sign on my

experience! Dancing just beyond, the butterfly led me to you. But that was the last thing I thought of.—The boy, always remembering that the boy means me, made himself at length, like the small savage he was, a shoulder-knot of the psyche, the royal colors yet palpitating through it, but life and radiance gone. Then, keeping the sun in his face, he went along towards the brook, negligently fanning himself with his hat. The path led him into a grove of rustling young birches, whose exuberant glee was kept within bounds by the presence of a commanding hemlock or two, and here and there overawed by some martinet of a maple. The sward was still tenderly damp and starred with faintly-scented wild-flowers, and suddenly descending, it opened on the stream that, brawling over eddies and rocks above, here floated itself on in tranquil shadow, to brawl again in foam over eddies and rocks below."

“ Yes, I remember.”

“ The dew yet drenched the heavy over-hanging branches, the laurel-wreaths lay pale upon the other bank, the wild-rose breathed its fragrance through the air; coming from the interspersed sunshine of the wood, there was a sweet and serious spell about the cool noon-darkness here.”

“ Ah, yes,—I seem to feel it now.”

“ Sitting on a fallen trunk that bridged the brook, a little girl appeared, her apron full of all manner of blooms, dipping her bare feet in and out of the sparkling water, and in a rapture of silence as some bird in the bough poured forth his jubilant song. In a minute”—

Ruth turned upon him a smiling rosy face. “ In a minute,” said she, “ another bird seemed to burlesque the same song, the branches parted and tossed in a shower of sunshine, and the boy swung himself down to

my side. Then he bent low, hat in hand, and uttered his name: Constant Azarian."

"Yes, and do you know what *you* did? Stay, I'm telling a story, why do you keep interrupting? The girl, a quiet unsmiling child, very, very small, having almost an uncanny look about her countenance, with its great preponderating eyes, set in a floating frame, a nimbus, of bright hair,—it was bright then, Ruth, it answered brightly when the sun stroked it, black it lay in the shade,—the girl, I say, surveyed the apparition a moment; her clear glance seemed to penetrate depths in him who depths had none, but opposed a shallow reflection. That's the case, you need n't shake your head, I know it as well as another."

"No, no," said Ruth quickly, "you are mistaken, if you think so. There are deep waters in every one's nature. If they are sealed in the rock and slumber so darkly and

stilly that you do not feel them yourself, or only in indistinct yearning and groping, perhaps some day the great fact will come that shall smite the rock and set them flowing."

"Just as kind a little fancy as if it were the truth. Ah, I see, tiny artificer, you don't want to hear what you did. Did you remember it when we met again not long since, Ruth?"

Ruth nodded.

"Well, you may apply those pink fingers to your ears, while I return to our small people. He seemed at first to be only one of her dreams, then smiles broke about her face; here was what the sad little thing had waited for; she rose quickly and met him with a loud, warm, childish kiss on either cheek. The boy laughed. The tears swept over the girl's eyes. 'Come,' said he, in a sweet coaxing voice that took the edge off his words,—it's sweet now, is n't it, Ruth?

—‘don’t you go to crying. Your mother ’ll scold me if she finds it out. I came from the city, where girls don’t do so, you know. But I like to *have* you kiss me, first rate.’ — Ruth—? Well, no matter.—That frosted you. It took me some time to melt the icing. I remember how I bound your wreath, how I made the yellow loosestrife burn in your hair, and crowned your forehead with a wild lily, and said I should be sure to remember the azalia because it was like my own name, and you said it was delicious, and, more timidly, that my name was too ; and when I had praised you and said that flowers always made girls pretty, and how I remembered the ladies at mamma’s, shining in their silver wheat and great moss-roses, you begged to take the wreath on your arm, where you could look at it too. You ’d do the same to-day. Upon which I played the petty tyrant. O, don’t deprecate ; it ’s all fair enough ; I like to tyran-

nize, you like to be tyrannized. I called you my queen, my fairy-queen, and then catechised you. ‘What makes me a queen?’ said you. ‘O, because you choose me.’

“‘No indeed,’ said I, ‘it’s just the crown. I’ve heard my father say — my father’s a Greek, — did you know it?’

“‘What is it to be a Greek?’

“‘What is it to be a Greek! Why, it’s to be a great poet and a great orator and a great actor, and to have chariots and horses and games and beautiful temples and gardens and statues — O, I forgot to tell you, your mother wants you to help in the kitchen. Aren’t you hungry? I’ve got a hard-bread in my pocket, — girls don’t like hard-bread. Come, let’s go along.’ Ruth, that was I in epitome, a diamond edition!

“‘Should n’t you like some honey with your hard-bread?’ asked the little girl. And without more words she led the way to a hollow

tree and showed, through a crevice, deep down in its heart great cakes of that brown and golden encrustation of sunshine and perfume and dew.

“‘It’s good for my cough,’ said I.

“‘I like honey to eat,’ said she. ‘I guess the angels had it when they went to see Eve in Eden.’

“‘Very likely.’

“‘It’s real heavenly food. ’T was St. John’s while he wrote the Revelation. It’s made out of flowers; it’s the sweet juice of roses, and of azalias too. Warm rain-storms and the south winds and all the sunshine helped to make it, you know.’

“‘Yes,—but how are you going to get at it?’

“‘Why, I never do. It’s too precious,’ said she, confessing to a kind of sacrament of summer. ‘I just put my finger in there sometimes. There’s so much, I don’t think the bees mind.’

“‘Great I care whether they do or not! Here goes!’ and the bark was being pounded in with a stone, and a swarm of darkness, of angry seething turbulence, was raging all about us. Remember? Ah, I see,—your little lips are burning now.”

“I feel as if I were living those happy days over again.”

“If you call it happiness to be stung to death by the bees, I take issue.”

“Thanks to your master in Virgil, we escaped.”

“Finish the story for me, Ruth. Finish it as you did then.”

“I am afraid my invention is not equal to yours.”

“Little witch! You accused me of having saved your life.”

“And so you did.”

“Well, yes, I suppose I did,—as I said at the time, in a mimic and lordly complai-

sance. ‘But what ever made you mention the honey, I should like to know,’ was what I added then. ‘You should n’t have taken me right to that tree, you should have known better,’ growing severe as the remembrance nettled. ‘One of them’s stung my hand. Pshaw! I could save a dozen girls’ lives!’ replied your hero. But you were not waiting for his reply. So entirely had you already invested him with ideal attributes, that, knowing he would always say the perfect thing, your complete attention to his real utterance was unnecessary. You have n’t changed a whit. ‘O, you saved my life, Constant!’ you cried. ‘I always shall love you!’”

Suddenly Ruth started to find that her hand had been in his,—how long she did not know. And suddenly, somehow, she never could tell how and Azarian never could tell why, she found herself drawn and wrapped in a clasp that checked her pulses, and his

voice was murmuring, “Ruth, sweet Ruth, you told the truth! My own, you do love me!” And then his kisses closed her lips in burning silence.

Happy little Ruth, she could scarcely believe her senses; she felt discovered, and in her pretty shame was lovelier than ever, and during those early days had only to spring and hide her laughing blushes in his arms. She went home on air, it was not the familiar earth which they trod, the atmosphere was some rosy cloud of sunset enfolding them with radiance, informing them with warmth, youth and strength and immortality pulsed along their veins with every throb; it was the life of another sphere. She sat, that evening, in the enchanted circle of his breath, incapable of thought, she lay the innocent night in a dazzled dream of delight. The days floated along and bore her with them upbuoyed on their blissful tide. Ruth won-

dered at herself, looked curiously at her hand to think that his kiss had fallen upon it, glanced of a morning in the little dressing-mirror with half a reverence for the form he loved. She asked if it could be true that this transcendent fate was hers; she had seen so much sorrow that she fancied such joy was almost heaven-defying, and, fearing the crash of some thunderbolt, opposed nothing but humility; she understood now why certain ancients poured libations and deprecated the offices of evil deities and untoward chances. She had sometimes thought of love, as all girls will,—perhaps had longed for it, perhaps had sighed to see the bloom of youth departing and leaving her without it; and suddenly the mighty gates had swung aside, and a great destiny had taken her by the hand and led her to the edge of heaven. She wondered, too, what the matchless Azarian had found in her; she trembled lest there might have

been a glamour on his eyes that should dissolve and let him see only the little threadbare soul of Ruth Yetton. She desired to enter his inmost being, and in praying that he might become one with her she strove to make her nature ever lovelier that he might suffer no degradation. She confided to Azarian all these fears and fancies, he received them as a romance of which he unexpectedly found himself the hero, and heard their novel burden with pure pleasure. He was abandoned to this happy flight of time, this forgetfulness of the outer world, not by any choice, but as it were in spite of himself. He sat just now like some one dazed by the lights at a banquet where the future was perpetually pledged; the cup was in his hand, and all the years to come will present Azarian nothing of more virtue than this elixir at which he only wet his lips.

II.

BUT as Ruth loved, she labored. Here this strong efflux of her heart swept her out on its current to a fuller and richer performance ; those autumn-leaves illumined the place ; nobody but Nature and Miss Yetton dared to use such shades, some one had said.

There they lay, as if the very earth had dashed her heart's-blood through them, — the stains of rust and gold, the streaks of sun, the sign of jostling coteries, the sinuous trail of the tiny worm traced in tawny tints amidst the sumptuous dyes, dun here as if wine had been poured upon them, blazing there in vermeil ardency, one opaque with a late greenness full of succulence and studded with starry sprinkle and spatter of splendor,

another dancing on its airy stem a golden flame transparent as a film of sunshine,— the tender purple of the pensive ash, the gilded bronze of beeches, the fine scarlet of the blackberry-vine,— these separate and delicately wrought and grained with rare blending of umber and carmine, damasked with deepening layer and spilth of color, brinded and barred and blotted beneath the dripping fingers of October, nipped by nest-lining bees, suffused through all their veins with the shining soul of the mild and mellow season,— those heightened by swarming shadows of blue and gray and cast upon the page in a broad ripe flush and glow as if fresh-bathed in wells of crimson fire. To slender petiole and node and bud, they lay there finished and perfect.

“Pretty Patience!” said Azarian, spreading them about him. “How you sting me! I complete nothing. But these—do they not really put a polish on Nature?”

"Not unless you put the polish first in plucking them for me."

"Made for a courtier. Well, when the republic is in ruins and I am county of clouds, one room in our palace shall have panels of these in great boughs, so that we may fancy ourselves in sunset at command."

"When the republic is in ruins' our dust will be forgotten,—so you shall have them now!"

"Not so fast. I for one expect a driver. I'm tired of this omnibus where every fool is pulling the check. There's a hickory for you! Little woman, you have a pact and league with certain tipsy dryads, I'm sure; they had such a head of color on when they told you their secrets that they reeled. Superb.

'That crimson the creeper's leaf across,
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
On a shield, else gold from rim to boss.'

You're a witch with a charm at your fingers' ends."

"Why have you never completed anything, Constant?"

"Still harping on my daughter?" You want to read me a lecture, do you? Neither variableness nor shadow of turning. So to speak, I never *did* complete anything. The portraits are nothing. Then there's my antique,—it's a fact in physics, that where the head can go the rest can follow; so having cleared the way, I relied on that fact and left the fellow to shift for himself,—if he wants to come he can. It's true in other things as well; had I never admired your works with my head, I had never admired you with my heart,—always allowing that I have one: where my head went, my heart followed."

"Yes, dear, but"—

"Well, then, there *is* one affair finished; but you'd laugh at it."

"I?"

“ Truly? I will subject it to your sublime consideration this evening.”

When Azarian had gone, Miss Yetton saw that her father was busy at his work,—a series of her painted cards whereof he meant to make a Jacob’s Ladder of flowers and angels, with which to surprise some one of the little children whom he met upon his strolls, but which made progress backward, because, as Azarian said, when it should be done he would have to part with it, and the old gentleman was loath to make renunciation. Leaving him happily humming over them all, she went out in search of Charmian.

For many weeks Charmian had been away with the company that she had mentioned; she had written to Ruth of her approach, and Ruth had seen by Azarian’s paper that she was at last announced for that evening. Knowing that it would be vain to seek her elsewhere, she bent her way to the theatre, and slipping in

past green-room and dressing-rooms, through all the labyrinthine ways, under the lofty flies,—astride which Azarian had told her he once was fond of sitting, so that the opera-strains rose blended in a perfect strand of unison,—slipping by juts of scenery where trees grew out of fireplaces, and among great coils of ropes and pulleys, cables reaching this way and that, up and down, all in a kind of yellow twilight, a hollow sunshine, far aloft, swimming full of dusty motes,—till, stealing over one end of the bare stage, she took an empty chair and watched her chances. Before her lay the great, silent, black and empty theatre, beside her moved a throng of tiny people chattering in an inane and indifferent way some to the rafters and some to their gloves, with much flirting and grimacing in the side-scenes now and then stridently hissed by the prompter. As Miss Yetton gazed out into the vast building, along the vacant pit, up



the galleries, whose crimson luxury and gilt and frescoed fronts were all hidden in sombre stretching draperies, some sense of the drama of the world suddenly struck her, its tragedy, its wild comedy like ocean-spray tossing at the moon, its unities and antitheses, its Fates, and, being ever a less reflective than sentient nature, it was more by hit than any good wit that, as a vague premonition of her own part therein floated athwart her perception, she did not rise and rehearse with wringing hands. But perhaps a little breath saved her, for between life and emptiness there is alway set a certain gulf, which, however feasible it seems, it is from either side impossible to cross and to return again, and here the gulf was music,* from which an

* "A little gulf of music intervenes,
A bridge of sighs,
Where still the cunning of the curtain screens
Art's paradise."

Mrs. Hows.

idle air blew up and scattered her dream,— for from two or three instruments down there on the edge of the void there gushed under its breath a lilting sparkling stream, an airy capriccio, a wild witch-music, the flutes, with the deeper wood winding in, the violins dancing pizzicato, and the three braiding into harmony at the close,— and, under the magic wand of the conductor, the wide amphitheatre seemed slowly to assume the guise of the glittering night, blossoming out with head after head beyond, jewels and shining silks and snowy furs, with creamy shoulders and beautiful faces lingeringly unfolding like the petals of a rose, with the great basket of light up there in the dome pouring down on all its brimming burden of lustre. Suddenly, a voice crying, “A pound and a half more to your thunder!” startled her, the light and color flashed off and faded, the place was bare again, the rehearsal was over, and Charmian was approaching.

Charmian looked very stately and pale in her black silk, with a hood half thrown back, but her face was beaming as she took Ruth's chin and tilted her head that she might look into the eyes,—eyes for a moment timid, then frank and resolute.

"So, you fancied you had a secret for me," said Charmian. "Ah, tell-tale face to betray the shrinking heart! I should have known it if I had not met Azarian and walked here with him an hour ago. And angered him withal. Are you happy, Ruth? Tell me, does your heart seem all shivered and dissolved and floating like motes in a great beam of joy? Are you truly happy? Well, then, I am. Kiss and be friends. Dear little child, you love me yet?"

But Ruth had her arms already about Charmian's neck, for they were alone, and was kissing the white throat in a half-hysteric of confession and assurance.

"What an impulsive passionate child it is!" said the other. "Here is a posy for her," giving her the single blossom which she had been twirling in her hand. "I kept it fresh all the way. It came from the great government greenhouses. Look at it, Ruth, so regnant on its stem. The lady of a Venetian Magnifico assumed such shape in order to live on a little longer among her old colors and splendors,—but it took the torrid belt of this New World to give it to her."

"Yes, yes, it is—But I want"—

"No you don't, my dear. I am not going to hear a word till I can have it all in a nice cose inside your own room. And then there is not time; I make a luxury of my enjoyments, and I am not going to take your story by bits. Dear Ruth, you think I don't want to hear? But I am stunned and dazzled,—why did n't you write?—though I ought to have expected. I am heartily glad, child, to

have you in love, do you know. You won't think it intrusive? But I wouldn't give a groat for those who have not been once thoroughly steeped in a sincere passion. They stand on the outside, life has never been deepened for them, they know nothing of its arcana, they are cold, they are dull, passing shadows, unquickened sods. The world has no meaning for them, they are not beating humanity, but stocks and stones, their blood has not been set in tune with all the generations. Ah, well,—I have a history, too. One day you shall hear it. A great shadow darkened my way,—till it was transfigured. I shall always be simply Charmian. Ah, well. Why don't you ask your flower's name, Ruth?"

"Yes, Charmian dear?"

"It is the Queen of August. If you could see it throned, and all quivering and sparkling with its court! It would be your first actual

sight of one of those plants that the exploring expedition described as appearing to live with more than mere vegetable life, to soar to, and gain, the higher delight of the animal ; the petals — richest, most glowing orange — spring up erect with such a living joy, Ruth, and in those wings, and in its bright blue dart, the whole flower is like a hovering brilliant bird, a humming-bird perhaps. Is it not ? Don't you feel forcibly and irresistibly its claim to a rank with those creatures that appreciate life, even if it be only

‘The wild joys of life, — the mere living?’

But that's not the power of the thing, after all. It is this. Think of your country, Ruth, all your great, beautiful, beloved country, its wide savannas, its rushing rivers, its pastures and prairies, its mighty mountains, from tropical water to ice-bound coast peopled and peaceful and proud, and then think that the whole

of its crowded wealth freely blossoms in this single flower. Keep it forever, Ruth, it is your country's gift to you! There's the janitor nodding us out," and they went down the ways, still talking, and when they parted it was because Charmian was going to dine that day with some grand people. But she could come to-morrow noon, and Ruth was to tell her all about it.

Ruth was so glad to have met her friend, she had so much to say, so much to ask, such advice to seek; and the sweet confidence and counsel of a woman are not to be spared even when a lover is dearest and tenderest,—and a dim vague feeling, a phantom of pain, already followed Ruth, a haunting glimmer of thought that perhaps Azarian was not a very tender lover, perhaps it was not in his nature. For love, this great flood, had deepened all the channels of her being and made her wants wider. Still he had chosen her, and his way

of manifestation ought to be inconsequential, she half said in her thoughts ; so, dismissing her sole shadow, she tripped lightly along, anticipating the pleasure of her talk with Charmian, of pouring on a waiting heart all the recital of her happiness, anticipating that sympathy which is balm to the soul excited either with joy or sorrow, anticipating that to which she was herself to listen, with a tremor, since she could not associate Charmian with suffering, and since she had always seemed to be one of those people of large intuitions who are acquainted with every phase of a passion without its experience,—a thousand at once happy and sorry ideas occurring which must be repeated,—she had such a warm little heart, and was so grateful for this friendship. So she reached home and went out with her father in high spirits to their dinner,—never dreaming how high spirits presage misfortune.

It was in the evening that Azarian came,

and, in his lordly style, with a servant following to deposit a casket and a violin-case by the door. Azarian was brilliantly handsome that night, his face overspread with a shining pallor, his features, cut like those on some old medallion coin, keener in outline than ever, the thin lips curved in crimson and showering mocking smiles, the eyes — blue steel-clad eyes — sparkling at all they touched, and along his ~~low~~ straight brow the hair lay in great flaccid waves of gold drenched with some penetrating perfume, an Oriental water that stung the brain to vigor. Never was he so radiant as on this evening, so various, so charming, never was there such a seducing sweetness about his every motion to wile her soul away, and all the time some reserve under a control that, though imperial, was too graceful to be more than half suspected. Poor little Ruth,—it was something to see such a being bending all his powers to please

her, the love kept bubbling up in her heart and suffusing soul and body, she was afraid her face would harden in its breathing blooming smile. At last Mr. Yetton executed a long-cherished intention and went to bed, and when Ruth returned from her good-night kiss she found Azarian sitting before the fire and leaning to warm a hand at the blaze, the violin lying beside him, and the bow trailing from his other hand. She went and sat down on the mat at his feet, and was silent awhile, because too full of quiet happiness. At length Azarian spoke.

“I saw her, Charmian, to-day!” said he, with an abrupt anger.

A thousand quick thoughts lanced themselves through Ruth’s brain.

“Well, dear,” said she.

“Being an excellent mouser, she had guessed our engagement on sight. Some deity appears to have given her your happy-

ness in charge. She certainly claims a free-hold in you. Perhaps I was never more insulted than by her daring candor. We had one sharp thrust of words, we shall have no more. Do you hear, Ruth?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"This. If that woman darkens your door again, *I* never shall!"

"Darling!"

"I am quite in earnest, dear child" —

"You can't be. Renounce Charmian?"

"Renounce — the subject is not strong enough to bear such a heavy word."

"There, I knew you were in jest all the time. What do you tease your dear child for? Why, I love Charmian!"

"And you say you love me."

"I *say* so!"

"The strongest love must conquer. Mine or hers. Take your choice, Ruth."

Ruth could not believe him, it seemed as

if her happiness were a fairy thing of ice dissolving away in tears.

“O Azarian!” she cried, “I cannot do without her; she is all the friend I have; I love her!”

“All the friend you have,” he repeated, in a grieved and quiet voice. “Well, then—good by.”

He could leave her so! If Ruth had had the spirit of a mouse! As it was, she just clung to his hand. Then of a sudden he grew very kind, he bent, whispering endearments in her ear, smoothing down her fine disordered hair, letting cool kisses fall on her heated forehead, overcoming her with a calm dignity till she felt like a naughty wilful child. All at once Ruth stilled her sobbing, the troubled waters in her heart swelled and sighed into peace; Azarian was playing on his violin. A Guarnerius, one of the creations of that fantastic genius the Giuseppe

del Jesu, whose suave rich tone, and delicate yet penetrating sonority, bend and rebound beneath the tune;—a treasure among those brought by his father in that early time when the man had felt that the independence of his native land was a thing not worth struggling for, and, having culled the honey of Europe, came to these Western shores to pass his prime. What was there of which Azarian was not master? Ruth's admiration of his powers almost equalled her love of himself,—but just now she thought clearly of nothing of the kind, only sat wrapped in the mist of music, for he improvised a singing pastoral of night-fall when the kye come home. At length the sound ceased. Ruth did not speak or breathe, hoping he would retake the burden, and kept quietly gazing into the fire for the space of half an hour. Then she turned, and saw Azarian with his head fallen forward on his arms, as they lay upon the table, for some

reason very tired, and quite asleep. She came and sat opposite, watching him, watching the relief of the perfect profile, the lips half-parted in gentle respiration, watched the drooping lash, the fine thread of pulse that fluttered through those purple veins on the beautiful temple, watched the constraint of the position, yet the abandon of the sleep in it. A man, the ruler of the earth, with power to wrest their secrets from the stars and rend the lightning out of heaven, is yet so touching when he sleeps, because so helpless then, utterly defenceless he reposes in such confidence upon the universe, the dew on his forehead for sole chrism, the seal of holy sleep. The very act declares weakness, so that one would fancy a bad man, or a proud, ashamed to close his eyes, afraid moreover of all the demonic phantasms of that wild moment when the brain hangs between two worlds, and on the edge of either. Slumber is such confession ; volition has

ceased to crowd her secrets down, and the fixed cold features slowly upheave to the surface, and float on the tide of the hour! Perhaps Azarian's dream was not deep enough for any such surrender of his nature; if it had been, perhaps Ruth could not have read it; had she read it, she would still have loved him,—for once love, and you tear your flesh and blood away in wringing apart. As it was, she only guarded a tenderer silence, and bent yearningly over him, as a mother yearns in some passionate instant above the child on her knee. She thought whether or not it were possible to make this sacrifice that he demanded, and she saw that in the extremity of her affection she should esteem it lightness to lay her very life beneath his trampling heel. Still some portion of the sacrifice was Charmian's; and on Azarian's departure that night, Ruth refused the promise he would have exacted,

telling him laughingly that in the morning he would blush at himself, and forgive her. But Azarian shook his head, and, going, paused to call back from the foot of the black staircase, above which she held the candle and hung her pretty face, "Ruth, dear child, I am perfectly in earnest."

It was high noon of the next day when a something queenly tread came up the stairway. Miss Yetton's door was closed;—the bare hand knocked. There was a hurried sound within, and then stillness. Charmian tapped again, turned the lock, and partly entered. Ruth stood in the middle of the floor, just as she had paused, petrified, in hastening to the door, her face not less white than the paper in her hand. Charmian's glance coursed through the room, rested at Azarian's violin, and at his casket yet unopened, was caught a moment by a white gauntlet of his, flung, perhaps by no accident

on his part, like a gage on the table there before her,—then came back to Ruth and saw the whole.

“Come here, Ruth,” said she cheerily.

Ruth came.

“Things will be straight,” said Charmian then, “if not in this world, why then in another! Thank God for that! If ever you find Azarian’s love less worth than mine, come to me again! For mine will be always waiting for you.”

She remained so an instant, and Ruth, trembling, swaying, sank at her feet. Then she bent, and left in pledge upon Ruth’s shaking hand her ring, whose chrysolite was flashing like the morning-star.

Concerning that passage Azarian never asked,—its slender pain should have pricked his selfishness. Had the foe been an actress of celebrity, he might have swallowed her affronts, real and fancied; as it was, he had

already confessed to himself that his final captivation was a foolish affair, and, having philosophically resolved to make the best of it, he began by ordaining for his little Ruth other intimacies. Rank, Azarian assumed to be his own ; impecunious as he might be to-day, he meant in the golden future to make wealth his own also ; fame belonged to him, too, in that vista, by the inherent virtue of his easy powers ; and having thus retarded himself through the results of an impetuous moment, Azarian boldly asserted that he had the right to require assistance from his wife,—that she must put her hand to the social wheel and mount with him. But life has its apsides ; it is some little hidden stroke of nature, some sunbeam, some rain-drop, some frost, that rounds the ripeness ; it is, perhaps, some stir, some jostle, that completes the lingering crystallization. A trait of the kaleidoscope belongs to us all, a week's ab-

sence from familiar scenes will return one with the world on another centre,— and since Charmian's journey and engagement abroad, Azarian had not seen her play !

That very afternoon Azarian came, and with him two fine ladies of his acquaintance, to call upon his little *fiancée*,— he had wearied of the incognita ere that time. But under all their soft voices, their silks and sables, Ruth missed the great bounding heart of her friend. After they went, he stayed, on the edge of dusk, for a tea made gay with all his endeavor, and then nothing would do but the three together must sally forth and assist at a famous farce with Laughter holding both his sides, to make the fourth. He meant that Ruth should forget herself in jollity a moment, whether she would or no. On the next morning a soft snow-storm fell, and, well guarded among all its frolicsome myriads of plumy flakes, Azarian swept her out into the :

country to catch the daring sprite in the very act of his wizardry, to see the airy feathering of spray and tree, the pearly pencilling of the vine-stem, the waterfall bursting its way through caves of soft-tufted powdery crystal, the elms like foamy fountain-sheaves, the dizzy emptying of the sky, and all the wild delights of the magic hour,— till the arch broke up in sunset, and, returning home past long downy-drifting fields, they beheld the great flush overlay the dazzling smoothness with warmth, and beneath the hillsides of country churchyards looked to see how Nature seemed to have tucked in all the graves with this kind coverlid of the snow! A week of constant devotion,— to give him all possible credit, Azarian had resolved that Ruth should not feel the want of a friend,— at the end of it, he fancied she could no longer miss the other, his profession demanded him, and he was tired. He

had been very tender, and Ruth had been very happy ; she had shut one gate of her heart and let the waters there flow back upon themselves, and because the sacrifice had been great indeed to her, she was the more rejoiced, since it had been made for him. Now, as he turned himself with vigor to his daily work, she took up hers again, and was content to miss him in the daytime, his coming gave such cheeriness to night.

One evening, at last, Azarian brought the still unopened casket from its corner, before taking it home with him.

“ Well, Eve, my Fatima, have you learned the contents of this treasury yet ? ” said he.

“ How could I, thou Bluebeard ! ”

“ Yet it retains the relics of a passion. How indeed ? Never trust a woman where you can trust a key, is an excellent motto.” And he drew the article in question from his pocket, threw back the lid, and emptied the shrine.

"My talent in its napkin," he said as he held the thing for her inspection.

Carved in ivory with rarest skill, and finished to the last point of perfection, it was a vase on whose processional curve forever circled the line of sanguine beasts, the camelopard and the lioness, the serpent in his own volumes interwolved, with old Silenus shaking his stick of lilies, and the wood-gods in a crew, with ocean nymphs and hamadryades, and the rude kings of pastoral Garamant, bearing honor to that

"Lovely Lady garmented in light,"

who, sealed amidst a snowy chaos of broidered flower and vine, lay ever keeping

"The tenor of her contemplations calm,
With open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm."

Azarian looked at it lovingly as Ruth did. Often languid on other subjects, he was always enthusiastic upon himself, and as that

was the subject Ruth liked best, she was apt to find him genial. "I shall just set it, with all its blanched beauty, on the ground outside the walls of heaven, when I go in!" said he. "And never till then shall I part with it, never! I suppose you think, if I were the lover I should be, it would be a wedding-present for you then,—the white witch vase!" he added laughing. "Now sit down, Ruth, and read the poem to yourself. It is the Witch of Atlas, you know, that topmost piece of pure fancy. I wonder no painter ever got tangled in its themes,—it needs the color,—there is flame in it, too, to paint, such blaze of precious gums and spices as pigment and pencil have never made! Yet what might not the bare burin alone do for those

'Panther-peopled forests, whose shade cast
Darkness and odors and a pleasure hid
In melancholy gloom!'

And Turner himself need not have disdained
some flashes of the boat's flight, when

'The circling sun-bows did upbear
Its fall down the hoar precipice of spray,
Lighting it far upon its lampless way,'

or where, with richer contrast of shadows, the
billows

'roared to feel
The swift and steady motion of the keel.'

After all, it's best as it is, with no other illustration than its own. I've half the mind to break my vase! When I first read the thing, it was like, in its turbulence of fantasicism, some shattered frieze of the ages, with half the fragments lost; something of the antique rose before me, urns and sarcophagi, and Achilles casting his yellow locks on the tomb of Patroclus, when the sweet Witch shook

'The light out of the funeral lamps.'

Egypt came with all her grotesque awfulness

of imagery behind those naked boys chariot-eering ghastly alligators,

‘By Mœris and the Mareotid lakes.’

And it was one of the Wild Ladies of mediæval legends themselves, when, chasing the lightning,

‘She ran upon the platforms of the wind,
And laughed to hear the fire-balls roar behind.’

I like it because it has scarcely a human sympathy, because its region is so remote, the very shoreless air

‘Of those mysterious stars
Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

There’s the place!’”

And while Ruth read, Azarian played, played in murmuring minor with his bow lightly hovering over the strings, and supplied the verses’ only want, in a vague sweet melancholy.

So the evenings went, music and books and talk, so blithe and swift that times when the

lover failed to appear became a blank of lonesome longing. Ruth used to reflect in amazement that she had ever been happy without Azarian, and in her lowness as yet exacting nothing and accepting his least glance as free and generous largess, she never thought of reproach,—it was wonderful that he should come at all,—the times were all the happier when after any absence he came at last. Not so with Mr. Yetton. He fretted and wondered and watched, laid up a shower of sentences, none of which had he ever the heart to expend, and could not be induced to forsake his post till Ruth would lay her weary little head upon his knee, and let him fold his slender hands around her with a shadowy feeling that he somehow stood between her and sorrow.

The Spring was drawing near again. Azarian was very busy, and had already acquired no inconsiderable renown by the success of an operation from which few patients had

ever arisen with life. But his hand was tremorless, his eye was pitiless ; he had a keen delight, as it were, in surprising the Maker at his secrets ; his searching knife was the instrument of a defiant curiosity ; he dared beyond his duty, and he commanded success. To those who palpitated beneath the steel, his very courage was tenderness. There were some that he had upraised who worshipped him passing upon his way, as if he had the strength of a young god, and held the gift of immortality in his hand. More or less, murmur of this of course reached Ruth. She knew that his fortunes prospered, perhaps she was ever so little touched that he made no mention of marriage. But Azarian had not the intention of marrying till his menage could equal his ideas. Yet, whether or no, Ruth grew glad in the gladdening season, because Spring ever sends fresh sap along the veins of young and healthy natures, and for

the first gift of the opening year she painted the leafing of the lime as we find it on one of those unexpected mornings when the great sweet silent power has wrought outward in the night; the bare bough where the shining ruby sheaths dispart, that the tiny emeralds heaped within may tumble out together. She did not work now so assiduously as she had been used, for, besides the dissipation of her thoughts, her father was unable to go on their country rambles, and she seldom liked to leave him. Now and then Azarian brought in a fragrant bunch from the river-side, or left on his way home an armful of blue lupines, or else some sabbatia sprays,—those rosy ghosts that haunt the Plymouth ponds, and, risen from the edge of deep water among wading reeds and sedges, seem to belong only to that one incanting moment of waning afternoon sunshine,—now and then, but not often, and she contented herself with weaving her

old ideas into arabesque, initial-letter, and frontispiece, and harvested the sunshine of the long bright days for her old father's pleasure,—there grew, as June advanced, to be a something desert in the sense of them to Ruth.

Azarian had by this time a new fancy, on which he spent all his leisure,—a slender blade-like boat, that ripped up the river with a gash. In it, or in his wherry, he lay in wait for morn rising rosy out of the wave, chased the sunset along the streams at dewfall, and, shooting down again, lingered far out on the mysterious margin of midnight to surprise the solemn rites of the turning tide. After all, that was the sacred hour; it seemed to him that such absence and negation were required for the complete self-assertion of the deep. He leaned over his boatside, miles away from any shore, a star looked down from far above, a star looked up from far below, the glint

passed as instantly and left him the sole spirit between immense concaves of void and fulness, shut in like the flaw in a diamond. The sole spirit? What was this vast vague essence then, overpowering his tiny limitation, and falling and heaving with long slow surge about him? By and by, perhaps, the broken blood-red fragment of a waning moon leaned up the horizon, and tipped her horns to fill the giant cup hungrily hollowed to hold the ruby flood. But now it was all dim and dusk and dreamy. Above, a wide want, a lurch, an emptiness; beneath, a mystery that allured and fascinated and terrified, and all around and up from every side, the great tone, the muffled murmur, the everlasting fugue sung by the Sea. An unconscious happy strain was it, or a choral of rapt worship, or could a finer sympathy detect a restless sadness there,

“Infinite passion and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn”?

Was he weak ? he silently lifted his oars and stole away : Actæon was no myth to him. Was he inspired ? a sail ran up and lengthened on the wandering wind ; so much was the talisman for more. With senses known and named the poets deal, but there are others too subtile for any statistician to seize, whose rare quality should be like that of those volatile liquors which evaporate on contact with the air ; these a floating flower-scent wakens, a morning breeze just dashed with dew, the stray sunlight of an autumn afternoon, a breath of melancholy tune, and these absorb the sounds of sea at midnight. Azarian was alone, and brought no simply human joy or sorrow with him ; he made himself akin to the wild Thing about him ; it lay open to take him, it wrapped him in the silence of its song, ravelled the earth's webs from his soul, woke him only with a lull. He had been in other spheres, he had learned that

for which there was neither speech nor language. But though the deep-bosomed expanses never meant to reveal to him their inmost spells, and might spurn him from aught but their fringes, and though what the hour showed had not the power of what it hid, the imagination of this bold seeker defied them all, and filled every gulf and hollow with its light; his fancy flew like a bird and hovered over secret solitudes, and though he found in fact only what he brought, yet it was alchemized by all these unformulated agents. For Azarian was like a prophet who believes in himself, and has at least one worshipper; he fortified his faith and fertilized his possible genius with the tilth of these hours, and accepted his own service as necessary duty. Such experiences gave him material, since he argued that mere emotion is the crude mass, but, vivified to the intellectual point, it becomes art, and he that knows the cipher reads the revelation.

“Las flores del romero,
Niña Isabel,
Hoy son flores azules,
Y mañana serán miel,”

he hummed, as he sprang up from the dark wharves and threaded the lonely echoing streets without a thought of any soft saddening eyes that might have watched for him so long. Yet they who gather their honey from laurels will eat poison. Azarian was only sowing the seed of his rosemary.

Perhaps Azarian took no account of the purely physical pleasure his boat gave him, though in reality he was elated by the sequestration in the midst of garish daylight which it afforded, the speed and prowess were keen exhilaration ; and while nothing on the river competed with his swift supremacy,—neither college-craft nor water-barge, and if any dared the race, he heedlessly skimmed along, pausing perhaps to feather an oar in solitary dis-

dain, and darting off again in matchless flight, — there was, withal, the least effervescence of pride that added a tang to its relish.

In clear noon-snatches when he took himself to his boat, Azarian loved to peer down through the yellow limpid harbor-waters and watch the great anchors lying there blackly or throwing off a sidelong gleam to flicker idly upwards ; sometimes he stole an hour to go out and rock on the swell that the vast steamers left behind them ; once his oar tangled in the tresses of some drowned girl, he thought, but it proved to be only the gorgonia, a splendid sea-weed all pulsating with glow of lakes and madders, which, when he had carried his boat between the bridge-piers and away beyond to her moorings, he took fresh-dripping to Ruth, although, so soon as it was dried in a pale purple plume, he reclaimed and donated it to the Natural History rooms. There was a charm to him, as

well, in the flavor of human life that bordered all the region of tar and cordage, of aerial spire and dark and crowded hulk, the life that waited on the whistling winds,—the ships winging in from foreign lands brought a passenger they never felt, the bales of merchandise swinging up from the holds were rich with a dust of fancy that did not weigh in the balance. Thus every moment became a lure, and gradually all Ruth saw of him was in these broken bits of time, a chance half-hour at night, a little stroll that ended for her at the hospital-gate in the morning, or now and then when he came and went out with them to dinner. And of late Ruth used to turn and look after him with a quick sparkle in her eye,—these long longing days were not making a saint of her,—and then go home and cry over her viewless work to think that she could have been angry an instant with her dear heart's-delight. When,

at last, Azarian ran in one morning, in insolent spirits, and singing gayly,—

“ If you want to go a-fishing,
Do your duty like a man,
Tar the rope and tar the rigging,
Ship ! on board the Mary Ann ! ”

and with a hurried kiss and word was off in a vacation for a trip to Labrador, Ruth took a valiant heart, plucked up a little pride, wished him *bon voyage*, and tried not to throw a glance after him. But treading lightly back upon his steps, he flung open the door and caught her after all peering through her ivy-vines ; — her pretty play of piquant anger lent her some momentary importance, and he dallied with a lingering adieu that made her sad and glad at once.

But now Ruth resumed her old toil with a will. Previously she had felt little of that independence which many maidens cherish ; she had indeed laid by and invested a few

hundred dollars, and had meant to add to it, that one day her father might have his long desire and return to some little house among fields and hills again ; but since her engagement, this had been a secondary thing ; her father she knew could never leave her, she earned enough for each day's wants, and, far from wishing to make provision for the future, she had preferred reliance on Azarian, she was glad that he should give her all, she had desired to owe everything to him,—but now things were changed. So she worked. The time had come to her at last, as it comes to every woman, when she felt herself to be an integer, and could not brook the treatment of a cipher. Suddenly one morning she flung down her pencil ; some secret spring, she felt, was undermining all the fair foundations of her love ; she made a little bonfire of the things she had done during those feverish days. Then she turned to her father,

and her heart smote her to see how pale and patient he sat there while she had been absorbed in her own angry fancy.

A pathetic pain cut her to the quick, as she contrasted this forlorn wan shadow with that manly youth of his still within her recollection. And after that was gone, fond old memories began to stir in their sleep, while she gazed on him,—memories sad only with that pensiveness which clothes the past. Little home-scenes in the old country-life, bringing the smile with the sigh: the massacre of her innocents, fifty babies organized from transverse rolls of rags and concealed, under a loose board in the garret floor, from the invasions of the boy Azarian lately arrived,—on seeking which hoard one morning, shrill whoops beneath the window filled her soul with dismay, and she looked down on the boy, hatchet in hand, executing a war-dance before a log where lay the fifty, with

their little heads completely severed from their bodies,— and Ruth had wept for her children and would not be comforted. Then her father had showed her the securer nest of a flat rock in the middle of the wheat-field, and, with her two hands before her, parting, like a swimmer, the tall waving growth that arched overhead with a thousand trembles and curves, and feeling it close up behind her and leave a trackless path, she went every summer's day to her retreat, always letting the walk be slow and stately, with some dim Biblical association of grandeur, half dreaming herself to be a Hebrew child in the great path of the Red Sea or stepping across the Jordan, behind the shrilling trumpet-strains and between lofty ramparts of scattering chrysophrase momently battlemented in dazzling cresting foam,— till, reaching the flat white rock, hidden from all but the ardent sky, she became absorbed in fresh family cares

with dolls made from clustering grass-spires uprooted and inverted, the locks combed out upon their heads, and their lengths dressed in store of leaves which she had brought along, among which if by chance some early-ripened spray were found with all its colors kindled by August suns, her little people rustled about as gorgeously as dames in Indian cashmeres and silks of Smyrna. But here, too, Azarian had surprised her. She remembered placid Sundays, then, when her father used to take his book, and go out with her into the woods, and, after he had sung his hymns, lie back in the grass and let her play with his eyes, poke about the lids with her rosy finger-tips, lift the fringes, stare down into their black wells that always gave back her tiny reflection, close them and drop her little kisses there. And with that, she bethought herself of the real well, balancing on whose curb one morning and admiring

the bright-eyed laughing little girl down there with the red cheeks and the mouthful of pearls, she had fallen in herself, carrying in her plunge the bucket and its chain that rattled in her ears like thunder; and just as, faint with horror and cold, her cries had ceased, and over her the sky had seemed to darken and send out its stars, a great bright face, an Angel's face, interposed between her and the deepening heaven, and with his feet striking from stone to stone of the greenly-streaked and slippery shaft, and steadied by his hand along the chain, her father had dashed down and swept her up, as it seemed, in a breath, and tumbled her out into the warm noon light and upon the fresh and fragrant heaps of hay. And then, with recurrence of the chill, she thought of the broad hearth at home, the blaze in the vast chimney, that, summer or winter, never died, but sent the light of its flashes to dance over

dresser and wall, painting a hundred ruddy pictures in the bright pewter hanging there, and she remembered how her father had told her the tradition that from a fire never once going out in seven years the little salamander sprang, and sitting before it there with him night after night, in every puff of smoke that rolled upward faintly blue, in every fall of embers that trembled apart into white ash and glowing coal, in every ooze and simmer of the singing log, in every snapping knot, she had looked for the ruby outline, had feared the sparkling eyes, had listened for the voice of the mysterious being born of fire and dwelling in its hot and terribly beautiful recesses. At such times, too, her father had sung her strange ballads, barbarous things, but with a sweetness like that of wild-honey in their tunes,—Fair Rosamond,—the lay of where the ships go sailing,—a Revolutionary air whose quaint melody charmed

her not half so much as the dramatic justice subsisting between two of its stanzas, running in this wise: —

“ Next morn, at broad daylight,
The Constitution hove in sight ;
Dacres ordered all his men a glass of brandy O !
Saying, do boys as you will,
Here our wishes we fulfil,
There’s a Yankee frigate bearing down quite handy O !

“ When Dacres came on board
To deliver up his sword,
He was loath to leave it, ‘cause it looked so handy O !
You may keep it, says brave Hull ;
What makes you look so dull ?
Come, step below and take a glass of brandy O !”

Ruth reflected, too, with what a keen adventurous relish he had used to peal forth old hunting-refrains, or the burden of some wild sea-song.

“ The stars shine bright, and the moon gives light,
And my mother ’ll be looking for me.

She may look, she may cry, with a watery eye,

She must look to the bottom of the sea,

The sea ! The sea !

She must look to the bottom of the sea.

And the raging seas did roar,

And the stormy winds did blow,

While we poor sailors climbing up atop,

And the land-lubbers lying down below, below, below,

And the land-lubbers lying down below ! ”

And then she had crept into his waiting arms
and been lulled to sleep by the sad strain of

“ Weep no more, lady,

Thy sorrows are in vain ;

For violets plucked, the sweetest showers

Will ne’er make grow again,” —

all in those dear dead days when her father
had completed her whole horizon. But ah !
how different now,— how her reliance had
turned into support, and how poorly indeed
she was giving back to-day the wealth of com-
fort and delight with which he once enriched

her, when he had it to bestow ! He sat there so old and melancholy and feeble, she recalled him so hale and buoyant and young,—the tears fell down her face.

There was a bright glance in Mr. Yetton's eye just then, to which it had long been unaccustomed ; he was bending forward, and gazing about him with a bewildered air. Ruth went and slowly brushed her cheek across his brow.

“ Dear,” said he quickly, with almost a vigor in his tone, drawing her away and holding her to look at, while his mind travelled back one phase, “ things are very strange. Where is Charmian ? ”

Ruth burst into tears outright.

“ Don't, my dear,” said her father regretfully, forgetting his question, and still travelling back. “ I seem,” said he, pressing his hand against his eyes, “ to have been in a dream. Things are very strange. Ruth, my

love, tell me all about it, all that has happened since,—since we came here, for instance."

Was it possible that that old intelligence was returning? that the passivity, the trance, would pass, and her father be again the strong, bright man of plans and hopes, such as once he was when with stalwart form and nervous limb he carried his child along the fields, leaping the brooks, and snapping off broad branches for her parasol,—so much do we connect mental with bodily vigor! Ruth's trembling hope burned in her cheeks and dried her tears like fire. She sat on the arm of his chair, and repeated the little story with a caress for every period. She told him of her work, of her happiness, of her love, even of that day when first Azarian had claimed her favor; but she breathed nothing of neglect, of selfish pleasure, of tears, or of repining. For though Ruth might feel, she would not as yet reflect. Yet perhaps that which she

did not say her father's awakening power divined.

"But you have spoken no word of Charmian," said he, his own remembrance all alit.

"Charmian does not come here any more."

"—— Ah, child! I see it all, I see it all.
And yet her love was best!"

Ruth shivered at the thought. Had her father woken simply to tell her this? She could not believe it, though one came back from the dead.

"And where did you say Azarian was? I must see him first, I must tell him to be tender of my child before I go."

"Go where, dear father?" asked Ruth, with a hasty pang, bringing in her glance from the evening-star that glimmered through a long wreath of roseate vapor. "You are not going anywhere? You will not leave me?"

"Yes, dear, for a little while. Only a little

while.— You spoke of the money saved, and said it was for me, my love,— you don't regret ? ”

Ruth laughed,— though something made it hurt her,— all that was so entirely his.

“ Not but that I shall repay the sum, a thousand fold, a thousand fold, my dear ! You shall ride in your carriage, your path to it shall be carpeted with cloth of gold. Nobody's affection will toss you off when you have the soft lap of wealth to fall into. Money is the measure of the world, to it wit, genius, power, fame, all are transferable ; a man's possession of it is the gauge of his real worth. Yes, yes, Ruth, your name shall yet weigh down a million ! ”

“ Dear, dear father, we are so much happier as we are ! Be still, dear ; put your head on my shoulder and let me sing to you your old tunes.”

“ Yes, Ruth. I am going away for a little

while,— to that bright country men talked of when I fell ill, where, as they say, the streets are paved with gold and precious-stones.” But there a news-boy cried in the square,—seldom thing,— and he sent her for a paper.

Ruth obeyed, only that she dared not thwart him; and, re-entering, unfolded the sheet, seeking for the place he wished. As she did so, holding the paper to the late light, an announcement caught her eye and sent the color up and down her face, an announcement concerning the stock in which, by Azarian’s advice, all her little investment had been made.

“ Dear father,” said she, “ it is getting so dark”—

“ What time do they sail, Ruth? Here, give me the paper!”

“ The first and twentieth, I”—

“ And what day is this?”

"The thirty-first,—but"—

"To-morrow! I shall no more than reach the boat if I take the night train. You must draw the money at once, Ruth!"

"It is," said she, with hesitation, "after business-hours."

"Never mind, I can easily negotiate your certificates; give them to me now, my love, and throw some things together in my portmanteau. Call a coach. It is all for you, sweet, all for you. Little one, my pretty one, when I come home I will hang a diamond on your forehead that shall blaze like that star up there in Heaven!"

He lifted his tall and slender frame, quivering in excitement, looking forward, and reckoning rapidly his dazzling dreams. What should she do?

"Dear father," she said, reaching up to wind her arms about his shoulder, "remember how happy we have been. We do not need

anything more. If we did, Azarian would give it to us. Remember—when I tell you something—that we have peace and praise and plenty."

"When you tell me what?" turning his face sharply upon her.

"Something I saw just now in the paper,—about where our money was. The place has failed. There is n't any money there. But we shall never"—

There was no need to continue; the weight upon her arm was growing heavier, the tall and slender frame sank back into the chair,—Mr. Yetton's heart was broken. He spoke no more, but kissed his child with a gasping sob, and, drifting through the night, was lost, when morning came, in eternity. Still there, but beyond her sight.

Poor little Ruth did not know how to be calm; long trial had abused her strength, all

her power of repression was gone, all her sorrow fell upon her at once. She lay with her face where his heart had been wont to beat, as if she would warm it into life again with her kisses and her wild bursts of weeping. She called to him, as if she could not speak and he refuse to hear, and, every time, the white mute awfulness struck like cold steel to her soul. He must stir, must smile; it was impossible, she cried out, that he would not turn and look in her eyes; when a little breeze blew in and lifted the fine gray hair from his brow, she thought to feel his breath upon her cheek,—but there was only the marble silence, the impassible repose. To her hand, there was nothing but chill; to her entreaties, the flinty outline sealed in frost, the impress of unchangeable Fate. A wail of despair left her lips as she shuddered down beside him again. It seemed to her that this was all she had, and this was gone. Three

noons, three nights, then the green sods covered him and she was alone at last.

They were dark days that followed, life seemed too heavy to bear. She remembered how she had driven with Azarian in the wintry sunset and seen the snow upon the graves, she thought with an agony of pity of the bleak lonely winds blowing over them, of the cruel sleet that would so soon beat above the dear old form. She would cheat herself into believing him in his chair, and, turning, find it vacant, and bury her face there as if it were his loving breast again. She would never feel those slender hands about her neck any more, she would never hear that voice, never look in that pathetic face; she had not made his life so happy as she might, and now she could never do another thing for him,—never,—and with the terrible word her soul dashed up against the immutable boundaries. She was so cold, so bruised,

so lonely,—some human help and love she wanted, some touch,—where were Azarian's arms? If he could only feel her sorrow, he might care for her as once, hold her in the old way, comfort her. A bitter instinct told her that, with all his skill, he should have known this might come at any time, and not have left her to meet its force alone, to struggle with its succeeding horror, to let Death drop the folds of his mighty pall upon her and shut out the light of the world. She remembered those recent vigils, remembered them in the midst of her grief, with a terror that she had not felt in enduring them,—that icy sculptured fixity beneath all the gusty sway of snowy drapery in the wind from the open casement. Lying there alone, utterly weak and unnerved in the long blackness of the moonless nights, she felt as if the fearful work, when the face indurates beneath the stony palm while the soul is drawn away,

were being done on her; all manner of ghastly fancies oppressed her brain, a weight like cold lead within beat out her pulse slowly, the tears brimmed and overflowed, a ceaseless sourceless rain; to her ken there was no life, no immortality, no power in the wide universe but death, and death was immitigable horror. There had always been for Ruth a degree of uncertain awe about the dark, as of something unknown, unformed, incomprehensible, incommensurate. She had never felt its spiritual analogy till now, now when it brought with it the bitter need of some almighty stay, and just as reason might have yielded to the shadows encompassing both soul and body, out of their heart came help, and she found this darkness of the grave brooding thick with mercies. The little bird that fluttered from the night-storm through the Northumbrian king's banqueting-hall, while the firelight bickered in the purple

bowls of wine and flung his shadow at the shields upon the wall, flew from the warmth and light and cheer out at the other door,

"Into the darkness awful and divine."

Divine, instinct with possible deity, for it is written He made darkness his secret place. And so when the terrors of hell had got hold upon her, Ruth turned and prayed, and at her prayer a white calm peace gathered and rose from the shadows, and fell upon her heart and her eyes like dew.

Sometimes now she stole abroad, when the evening came, and into a church at hand, where she heard the organ pealing,—a silent worshipper came in, a silent one went out, a penitent knelt motionless at the altar, another at the confessional; one burner shed a peaceful twilight over lofty arch and clustered column, dying dimly down the aisles and in the recesses of the chancel; a solemn

quiet reigned below,—and above, the voices of the practising choir soared in ecstatic music along the organ's golden blare. And Ruth stood there in the obscurity with folded hands and pale face, looking up the dark vaulted roof, and tried to raise her soul into sympathy with the place, to make it fit for heavenly love,—tried to find God in his world,—the God who had given her peace. She knew in herself that the vast Spirit which feeds the universe is beneficent as powerful; she dared to trust in the force that wound the stars upon their courses and shaped the petals of the flower; the care that surrounded insect and root would not be less kind to her. All things were best, she said, whether she ceased upon the idle air and was not, or whether she drew nearer the infinite depths of love, a pure existence mounting on endless æons. She felt how one had drawn her out of deep waters; thankfully she loved him, desired to

find him, to worship him, and lay her tribute at his feet. Her fears had fled away, and though the sight of some worn garment would bring the hungry heart to her lips, and some memory cause the trembling tears to fall, her very grief was purified. It had brought her towards a world she had never known,—already, to her hopes, the heavenly door flew open at a touch, and angels drew her in.

As the days crept by now, Ruth began to long for Azarian's return, with fresh eagerness; she needed his presence so much, his sympathy, his solace; she wished to impart to him this new experience, this glorious anticipation and confidence, to learn if any other human being had ever felt the same. However, he was not to come till September, so she schooled her heart to patience. But one morning that heart kept stirring with such a

wild insistence, that she felt as if he must be near, yet could not believe it to be anything but a dream, when the door opened and a face laughed in upon her, Azarian's face, though somewhat browned, a trifle ruddy, the thoroughly healthy work of sun and wind. So she sat there a moment, changed and pale in her little black gown, and gazing up at him with her always darkly mournful eyes, eyes as full of pathos as those of some dumb thing, which seem to express the sorrow of a silent soul,—then she sprang and cried upon his arm.

The reception hardly accorded with Azarian's desires,—especially as behind him there brushed a rustle of silk. He saw at once that it had been an error not to come first alone; but he made the best of it, brought Ruth to herself with a word, and presented her to Madame Saratov, a Russian lady who had known his father, and whom he had acci-

dentially found upon the Arabia when, heartily tired of the fishing-smack and its discomforts, he had made his way to Halifax and caught the steamer.

Madame Saratov was perhaps Azarian's age once and a half again ; but in her fair hair that betrayed no change, her complexion like snow over which a rosy vapor drifts, and all her patrician preservation, she gave no sign of years. For the rest, she was beautiful,—beautiful to Ruth as a mother might have been, with a bland beatific countenance,—beautiful to Azarian as, if he had not been overcome against his will by another, he would have chosen a lady-love to be, with a captivating charm of 'manner, with a voice that played freely in a range of dulcet tones and discords, with a sparkle of wicked wit and mischievous meanings here, with a strain of mystical piety there, with a character whose solution presented to him analytic pleasure.

Madame Saratov was a woman, in fact, like a faceted jewel ; and if she was not all things to all men, she was certainly capable of being a great many things to one man. Having accompanied her husband in exile until his death, her present purpose was to give lessons in French, in music, in her own language, in anything, and her ultimate object the education of her two boys, whom she had dismissed to school, having brought them to America for a career. Nothing was more pleasing to Azarian than, for the while, to consider Madame Saratov as his *protégée*, to put high price on her services and barriers about her acquaintance, to make her the fashion, and, in his own way, to take advantage of his position. Miss Yetton of course was to be a pupil,—poor Ruth, who was an ignorant little body and had small knowledge or expression beyond her pretty art,—and therefore he had gayly brought them together

without ceremony. Madame Saratov's tact was, however, superior to the situation, and in a few minutes she made her appointment, and, going, gave the thin hand so warm and full a pressure that Ruth felt with a thrill how precious some womanly companionship might be if Azarian would allow it.

Azarian returned in the evening, and was so genial and tender as to make Ruth absolutely cheerful. He expressed much concern about her loss, though none that he had been absent, uttering now and then some dark diagnostic word; and when his manner of listening became slightly, ever so slightly, indifferent, she fancied he thought it injurious for her to brood over the subject, and hastened to reassure him, and tell her inner half-confirmed joy, and all its source. But at the onset Azarian gave a great shrug, got up and walked across the room, and, taking his violin, began to tune it.

"Pur!" he exclaimed, "the cat is gray!"

• However, in a minute he laid down the instrument without playing, and was by her side again. But this was all the life Ruth had lived of late, and she had nothing else to tell.

"Oh, I wish you understood it," said she in her disappointment. "I wish I knew how to talk and make it seem real to you!"

"Little Whimsy, it is just as real to me now as ever I want it to be. If you're going to be a nun, why you may take the veil. Oh—the cold shoulder!"

But, with a pretty light in her eye, Ruth had to laugh back at him across the offending member,—he had resigned himself to it so composedly among the cushions.

"No," said she,—"only if you would care a little, the least little, about such things."

"What! The new love is the cuckoo to turn the old out of the nest?"

“O Azarian!”

“Now, Ruth, don’t try that fashion. Try forever and you can’t make yourself more charming to me than you were when I first knew you.”

“Than I was?” with a shy archness.

“There! Than you are! So don’t affect airs nor put on this little mask for the sake of being interesting. You were n’t brought up in it, you have n’t a moonstone rosary blessed by the Pope or the Patriarch, as Madame Saratov has, you have n’t an ivory and ebony crucifix mounted on jewels; and I advise you, if you want to preserve my affection, to remain rational, for, frankly, you could n’t bore me more than by playing the Guyon, for which Nature never intended you!”

Years afterward, Azarian used to see the mournful glance of those dark eyes rising like a spectre in his wine-glass in the ashes, behind the empty window-pane when the night

had fallen. Here it only impressed him as something quite exquisite, and he reached his hand for hers. Ruth gave him her hand, and in a minute she replied.

“I am sorry that you misunderstand me so, because I am afraid that you will not love me long if you think I could counterfeit such a solemn thing even in order to interest you.”

“I don’t think you could counterfeit anything. Now come kiss me, and let it all pass.”

“But, Azarian dear, I should think you would like to have my confidence.”

“Not when it’s silly. I don’t want to be made a fool of. Give me my violin, Ruth, an’ thou lovest me. Now the Tourterelle. And you shall have a Fantasie Glaciale!” And under his strains, that shaped themselves with a kind of weird crispness, Ruth’s fancy suffered her to see the icebergs building their glittering architecture of frosty peaks and

pinnacles up the blue vault, till suddenly all was grotesquely ended by the interpolation of a little phrase in another measure, a pair of chasing scales, that brought everything up standing with a twang. Azarian laughed with his white teeth.

“That was two little cubs tumbling down after the mother,” said he, “who snapped her jaws at me. Strictly pictorial music, good for the critics. Now, to farewells.”

III.

SINCE Azarian was at home again, Ruth forgot all the weary watching of June and prepared herself to be happy. Certain hours of the day she worked with her paints, and worked for money too, as all she had was gone ; later, she fagged over her books, for she feared, of all things, by her stupidity to do discredit to Azarian's choice before the Russian lady. Then in the long summer evenings she sat with happy fancies, if she had them, alone, if she had them not, for, to spare both her eyes and her candles, she lit no light unless thought and solitude became insupportable ; and she had said to herself that she had been very selfish, and that with all his social claims she had no right to expect Azarian on

more than two evenings in the week, and had told him so. However, Azarian ran in when he pleased, reported any piece of news, admired her work, said she was getting a color, played some air on his violin, said he kissed her hands. Or, on the contrary, if she were not there, he left some little imp sitting astride her delicately-drawn grass-spires, or ringing the chime out of the fairy bells of her Linnæa, or he turned her painted snowdrop into a plump wasp bleached for bridal,— as a card ; after which, of course, such things — when found with a little pang of regret at her absence, and well paid for by the loss of the next day's airing — were too precious to part with, if they had not, moreover, been spoiled. That made small odds though, for, famous as they had become, Ruth could not dispose of half she did ;— the year had been a disastrous one, the summer was very slow, a financial flurry was impending, and nobody had the price to waste on kickshaws.

But it somehow happened that Azarian did not always come on those two evenings appointed ; — either Madame Saratov had some fine circle, or it was the club, or the old seductions of the boat were uppermost again. Ruth, who had grown to count upon them at least, and who sometimes felt as if she required his presence so much that she must go out and seek him, waited till the clock struck midnight, in hopes of just a brief moment as he passed, yet waited in vain. Strange apprehensions beset her too, as she fancied him on the water at such times, fancied the keel of some plunging ship crushing down his little cockleshell of a boat in the dark, or when the thunder-storms had been rolling and rattling over the city, or when sudden flaws of wind came down and wildly rustled all the trees upon the square and sent the dust to heaven. Once, indeed, having some special promise that she could not dream of his breaking, and her

imagination all athrob and fevered with fear, she caught a scarf or shawl and ran out into the black hot night, meaning to make the water's edge ; when suddenly, under the shine of a street-lamp, she fell upon him sauntering along. And then, to prevent any such second interference, Azarian punishingly declined to enter, and left her at the door. But here this state of feeling wrought an unconscious attraction ; her sadness was so great at his voluntary delays over greater pleasure found with others, her expectation so strained and eager, that, when he did come, her spirits mounted to such a pitch of airy volatile gayety, forever rounded by the least shadowy refrain of the preceding hour, that her presence became an enchantment ; he watched their wavering as one watches a flame flickering in the wind, and not till he had discovered their secret was the fascination lost.

Ruth's lessons at this time were a great

blessing ; she left thought in them, and was hindered from reflecting upon how slight and loose a thing this love of Azarian's was. As he had foreseen, the Baroness Saratov became an object of far more interest than her position warranted, through the well-known weakness of many people ; a teacher, every one desired to avail themselves of her services ; a lady, every one aspired to her intimacy. She rented one floor of a small house. Her rooms were as cosey as any nest, and yet made elegant with countless trifles which had cost her less than nothing. To-day under her spell, a painting, with its palm-tree and pool and gorgeous sky, was hung there by a young artist who just began to dip his brush in wells of tropic color ; to-morrow a pupil who wished to do her pleasure begged acceptance of an album of the photographs of precious places in Europe ; yesterday a publisher had presented her with his choicest volumes ; she

had nothing to do but dispose them. That little gem, where one long ripple of green water broke on a curving beach, Marine had sent her, when after her extravagant admiration it yet found no purchaser; that bust Carrara had given in Rome, fresh from his chisel,—she had procured him a commission. An open pianoforte here, a half-veiled easel there, the single blossom of some rare exotic daily renewed in a snowy vase-stem, all conspired to produce dainty effect; and throughout, there was a stroke, an art, a sense of something foreign, that completed the charm, whether it were in the flask of delicate perfume forever exhaling to the air; the quaint ornaments,—a demoiselle-fly in such brilliantly enamelled metal that the sardonyx, the smaragdite, the sapphire, seemed to sheathe its mail, its wings so fine and airy ever hovering on the point of flight, yet with gravity sufficient for a paper-weight; a little basket

of snowy lightness cut from the fig-pith and filled with grasses, wheat-ears, thorns, and leaves, of the same dazzlingly delicate fibre, and looking all like one exquisite petrifaction, for allumettes ; for timepiece a tiny clepsydra, dug from an ancient ruin, thousands of years ago measuring the inspirations of the oracle, the winning moment of the lampad, the passionate greeting and parting of lovers long since dust, the smile of Rhodope perhaps, perhaps the vagrant song of Homer ;— the folding-screen of rosy damask ; or the occupancy. Madame Saratov was the creature of luxury, she demanded, and therefore had, the best of everything. A faithful maid haunted her steps ; her chosen raiment was silks and velvets ; she suffered from unpleasant dreams if the coverlet were less than satin ; she was always soft and white and cool ; her hands were still as beautiful as that model of them that peered from behind the droop of the cur-

tain ; she had kept her jewels through every reverse, and the very thimble with which she stitched the vine upon her cambric was thick crusted at the base with pearls. She had not been in town two months before she was on more familiar terms with every notable person than were those who had known them all their days ; the politician came to her with his schemes and benefited by her tact ; the star requested her reading of some passage, her tradition of some gesture, her idea of some point ; the preacher talked with her, and in her vein of rapt pietic ecstasy almost expected to see her translated before his eyes, and dropped his blessing on her bended head ; and in the warm shadows of her room, breathing the subtile odors, and sipping perhaps, betweenwhiles, draughts of some richly-rosy perfumed cordial, the poet read his verses, and went away intoxicated with them, with her, and with himself. It was especially

pleasant to Azarian to come and go, among all these more deferential, as autocratically as he pleased. She had a trick, too, of surprising her late-lingering company with little suppers, ravishing revels, when from tiny engraven bubbles of glass she drank to the health of her charming guests, in maraschino ; there was a flavor in the unknown dishes that made it possible to believe one ate the famous tart of pomegranates ; and if the feast consisted of nothing but sliced oranges, they lay under their crystals of sugar in plates whose ruby whorls or azure banqueted the eye. There was a silent kinship of race between Azarian and Madame Saratov ; in her he found that certain genial dash of foreign things which inheritance made delicious to his nature. In all her style, too, there was a saucy disregard of any future day of reckoning, a thing that suited him as well. These little suppers absorbed many an evening that by right

belonged to Ruth. It amused him, then, sometimes to accompany Ruth at her recitations, to contrast the two, to play them off, Madame Saratov humoring him, the other shrinking into herself; and if he chose to stay the hour, of course poor little Ruth, under his presence, made a very dunce of herself, though preferring even such display and pain, so seldom of late did she see him at all. Spiritless girl, not to throw him off, and when the pique was past weep lifelong solitary tears or else harden her heart to stone! But Ruth had not thought of that yet, so she endured his demure scoffs and laughed up at him beseechingly when the failure was egregious. Stepping into Madame Saratov's salon was, to Ruth, like an emigration to a distant country; she could scarcely blame her lover for delaying where it was in fact so delightful to herself; she coveted a fragment only of the other's versatility, but she saw plainly that

the foreign lady was not the friend her sore heart needed. Yet Madame Saratov liked Ruth, she was so fresh and simple; it was holding a wild-flower in her hand; she took pains to draw her out of herself, she refused others that Ruth might dally with her awhile, she helped her by severe criticism and glad praise, and she began to puzzle herself in wonderment over her engagement to so selfish and graceless a scamp as Azarian. She had serious thoughts of sprinkling a shower of water-drops in her face, so if possible to break the bewitchment. Azarian did well enough as her own courtier; she allowed him certain freedom there because he was so admirable; but she told him one day, with a laugh, that he reminded her of those vampires who grew fat sucking the heart's-juices of young maidens. Azarian drew the black brows together in a line over the icy pale-blue brilliancy of his lustrous eyes, lightened

once, and said no more. Neither did Madame Saratov.

Ruth used sometimes to wonder now in the October mornings, as she faced the glass, if Azarian cared less for her because she was not so pretty as once,—for Ruth had always liked her looks, in her own way,—she was so very thin and pale, and had such shadows under her lashes, and her cheeks beginning to seem as though she were no longer young. Azarian did not know what companion came and sat daily at her elbow in his absences, making her brain clearer, her ideas purer, her tints more vivid, but taking slowly in return the tone from life,

“Spare Fast that oft with Gods doth diet,”

and some little leaven of pride had, after all, remained, for Ruth never told him. Watching deep into night for one who did not come, the late hours, the excitement, the anxieties,

the grief, the determination against murmuring, even to herself, so inward as to be unknown,— all had their effect on health, and depression was settling upon her anew, that it needed but a touch to fix. She feared she was going to die and leave him; and because, when truth is plainest and denies, hope often is most buoyant and, knocking at heaven's gate, demands, she still trusted that a day would come when all his old desire of her would renew itself, and by unspoken intuitions she recognized his need of her saving grace at last, and felt her capability of bestowing it. Nobody else will ever love him as I do, Ruth thought; I was put here to serve him; if I should leave him, there would be no other one; when he comes to die, he will want—O so longingly!—a breast to lean upon. Perhaps behind that there was the glimmering thought that a home and its dear ties and sacrifices would yet soften him, and

give him all that he had not ; though, consciously, she would not acknowledge in her most secret soul that he was not already perfection. But the very fear, the dread of forsaking him so, leaving him loveless in the world, forbade her indignation to usurp her passion, and only made her tenderer.

But here, one day, Azarian commented on her looks, and told her she must cease her lessons. Then he took up his Guarnerius, and scraped a great yawn across the strings.

“ What a sleepy ! ” said Ruth, lightly. “ One would think you sat up last night till the clock struck eleven, for somebody.”

“ Nobody’s fault but her own. If somebody’s not here by nine, he’s not coming at all,” and he caressed the instrument beneath his chin ; for he loved its beauty of outline, its supple sides, its royal varnish, and its sounding soul. “ Ruth, have you been playing on my fiddle ? ”

"No, indeed ; you play enough for me. I wish —"

"Well, little — but you're not like an elder now, you're more like a snowberry,— what do you wish ?"

"I wish — *you* would n't play all the time when you come to see me," she replied, with a courageous coaxingness.

"So you don't like my music ?"

"Yes, I do. O very much. But I like you better."

"Quite adroit. But then, seems to me, you'd like me to take my pleasure. Oh, it's because I don't play classical music."

"I did n't know that."

"But, only fancy, every note I utter goes forth and becomes a portion of the music of the spheres ; and when the great composers in their trances reach up among the stars, they gather these very strains floating there or caught in the glittering web-work

of the orbits, and so my little tunes become parts of the great orchestral harmonies that they strike out deathlessly. Don't you see?"

"O yes; but"—

But Azarian silenced her with a kiss, and then another; for he really cared as much for her as it was in his nature to care for anybody except himself, and went off with his fiddle tucked under his arm.

One chilly twilight,—just when impatient feet are hurrying home to lights and laughter and cheerful glow of fires,—Ruth, alone, wrapped in her shawl, was startled by a voice beneath her window,—for minstrels were infrequent in the square,—a loud clear sweet soprano voice, that absolutely seemed to sparkle in its contact with the frosty air. She looked down, and by the aid of the lingering ruddy orange discerned a group beneath, a woman, hooded in a black kerchief, and clad in some fantastic disarray of garment that displayed

an ankle shapely under all its slouching apparel of slipshod foot-gear. She tossed a tambourine, and sung wild songs in an unknown tongue full of soft guttural breathings. At her left, in round jacket and red-tasselled cap drooping aside, her companion surrounded her lay with flourishes of tune from his violin. Behind them, two young tatterdemalions jangled strings of silver bells in what unison they could. Ruth opened her window, the better to hear and see, and leaned forth. The strong full voice poured in richly, and the player, bending to his task, sent up honeyed strains of accord, the jets leaping and spurting from the strings beneath his powerful stroke. In the first break, Ruth ventured to laugh and gently applaud; then Azarian, who had concealed his face, looked up, with a flash of his teeth in response, and Madame Saratov opened a pouch and displayed a glitter of coin.

"A penny for your thoughts?" begged she, in her alluring accent. "It is a charity: add your mite, pour les orphelins. Then come home with us and count it."

Azarian was looking. Ruth tossed down her silver, though it was the very last she had. To-morrow — well, to-morrow must take care of itself. Providence provides for artists and authors as it does for the birds of the air. Then she closed the window, caught up her bonnet and gloves and ran down to join them, and went along positively gay with the adventure and with the prospect of Azarian all the evening and perhaps home again with her. Fast at their heels the young vagabonds followed, jangling their peals.

Entered, and under the glare of gas and mirrors, the elder twain burst into laughing at their odd figure, and the younger performed an antic dance round the apartment,

with all kinds of quaint and graceful gesture moving to the wonderful music of their bells ; after which Madame Saratov insisted on bivouacking like Gypsies on the carpet and telling their gains ; and then, dismissing Isa, would wait on table herself, though there was nothing but a cup of tea and some cracknells, at which, to Ruth's perplexity, they were joined by the urchins in their rags, who were no other than Messieurs the Barons Saratov, she discovered, as with malicious enjoyment of her silent surprise Azarian presented them to her,—Azarian full of his freaks, and keeping up his character by snatches of music between the sips, now and then telegraphing a caress to Ruth through the farther end of his bow, for no object but her embarrassment. When, however, the hostess and her young train withdrew, she half hoped he would signify some real, if faint, pleasure at her society ; Azarian did, indeed, enjoy it, but never

thought of telling her so. On the contrary, Madame Saratov found him, as she had left him, industriously sawing away, and weaving her Northern melodies into some Scandinavian reverie of Freya of the golden tears seeking Oder and beguiling all her way with airs of heaven. Azarian looked forward to a whole lifetime with Ruth, and did not dream of economizing the present. Meanwhile the young gentlemen, in altered guise and raiment, fresh from bath and toilet, had already stolen back ; and, looking at their open handsome faces where the noblest marks of their vigorous race were strongly written, Ruth's fancy warmed toward them, and then, after an initial period, she found herself in a low voice with the exaggerating aids of free-playing eyebrow, contrasting attitudes and tones, recounting to them a laughable legend of their own trolls, which it was no wonder they had never heard, as it was purely an invention

of Azarian's,— illustrating it, as she went along, with grotesque hand-shadows on the wall, and with a mimicry of expression that made her, in speaking, every character at once. It was Azarian's turn now. He watched her in surprise. If he did not frighten her out of all confidence, what a treasure was this for a rainy night! The boys, who were at that age when the stature seems to pause to gather strength for its sudden leaps into final maturity of size, hung on her words at first with parted lips, remaining motionless through the instinct of their somewhat courtly manners, and then at last, the barriers of a flood of merriment giving way, rolled over each other on the floor, picking themselves up, with profuse apology, as their mother's hand was heard upon the door.

"Well," said Azarian, on the first lady's return, "what is the order of the evening?"

"Miss Yetton and I do attend the theatre,— alone,— unless—?"

“ What is there there ? ”

“ The new play goes to present itself, and La Charmian.”

“ Charmian ? Pshaw ! ”

“ Let me tell you that your ‘ Pshaw ! ’ is an actress very remarkable.”

“ Remarkably bad, yes.”

“ O oui ! Mais vraiment oui ! Qu'il parle ! She who becomes a woman of the most famous ! I go many of nights to see her ! I count of my enthusiasms the Charmian ! ”

“ Tant pis ! ”

“ So you will not go ? You shall have but few of chances more. She has success ; she goes to make to commence an engagement in England for some years ” —

“ Glory go with her ! ”

“ That it will, in three weeks. And you will not applaud ? ”

“ In this costume ? Pardon. I will be there to wait upon you, with permission.”

"Thank you for nothing," she laughed.
"Les voilà, a bodyguard to make you yawn!"

"As Madame pleases," he replied, bending his ear to catch a vanishing semitone. "Do you want to go, Ruth?"

Madame Saratov, instantly outraged, was instantly appeased by the novel appearance of consideration. But Madame Saratov was not behind the scenes. Ruth had hesitated at the proposal; little heart had she for such gay places; but then to see —. She nodded with shining eyes. So they started down the bright streets on their long wide windy way, Ruth's hand grasped by the boy Ivan, of whom, on letting them out, Isa, indignant at some jest, had declared: "Such a child was not before born into the world. His tutor, if vex, do report that he laugh all the time, and when he don't laugh, he gap!" Azarian strode silently beside them, seated them comfortably at last, and betook himself off.

Madame Saratov finds out who is there, at a glance, collects her hovering chevaliers, and lets Ruth abandon herself to her dreaming. It is the same intoxication to Ruth as ever: the lights, the hues, the stir; she hardly sees the curtain rise, but suddenly finds herself living the life the scenes present.

The play opens in the palace, at the table, with music, and slaves bearing golden dishes. There are present the old Emperor, courtiers, among them the impetuous Lucinius. When one mentions the late victories in the East, the Emperor bends, and, with bland smiling mouth, but eyes whose fires beneath gray brows might wither him to ashes, asks Lucinius concerning the victor, and straightway Lucinius launches into panegyric till silenced by the angry monarch who breaks up the brilliant feast in dismay. Then the scene changes to a moonlit garden, with soldiers in glittering armor and upright battle-axes

keeping the imperial gate. Grouped in a knot they converse, low-voiced, of the young general now on his return from conquest; they rehearse his spoils, remind each other of the wonders of his celerity and his combinations, tell of his gallantry, his generosity, his genius, and of the jealous power upon the throne at home continually thwarting him and to-day refusing a triumph. As they speak, a slender girl comes floating down the long garden-aisles where all is dusky peace and serenity, her white robes fluttering about her, her black hair loose beneath the thread that binds a trembling silver star upon her forehead. Their words arrest her; she draws near, and stands in the semi-shadow with folded hands and bending brow, and the silver star flickering and darting its rays as her pulses stir. The only word that escapes her is his name,—Aurelius. The guard perceive her. It is Virgilia, they exclaim, and with-

draw each upon his separate beat. She advances then a step, but still remains rapt in the heroic fancies his name evoked, now and then repeating it beneath her breath. As she yet stands, enter two courtiers,—one talking cautiously, the other Lucinius. They return from the banquet, and speak concerning it; for there is small doubt but that Lucinius has given the hoary tyrant deadly offence by his daring praise of Aurelius. But O for one day of Aurelius! Lucinius cries. The army all his own, would but some hand blest by the gods do to death our tyrant,—he has one heir alone, who does not know her right, and, believing herself to be kinswoman of the dead Empress, never needs to know it,—and with Aurelius on the throne such glories should arise on Rome as might make wan the lustre of her past. Ah, what heart is hot enough, what hand so holy! Here, at these words, as she leans forward, with half-raised

palm and flashing eye, the startled knights salute the Lady Virgilia, and pass on silently; but before they reach the gate hidden emissaries spring forth, and, leaving the other, hale Lucinius to a dungeon. Virgilia has seen it; it adds only one more to the long list of tyrannies that she has known. Alone, her thoughts declare themselves,—this hero, dwarfed from his possibilities, becomes in her eyes a god; how great must be the stroke when the vibration rings in all men's ears! To aid his wide renown, to serve him even so much as by being the dust he walks on, to cease the base servitude under which her country totters, to drown the groans in shouts, to open dungeon-doors, to make way for such glorious reign,—her stature rises, the star shines on her uplifted brow, her face glows with devoted purpose. But the way,—the way! A trembling seizes her,—there is but one! Then she goes. She who came a pure and happy

maiden departs already sin-stained in her dreams,—a bold and terrible contrast. There follows a quick pageant of other scenes, where Virgilia, still nursing her idea of crime, dispels all circles by her mere approach. In the wide hall some game goes on ; Virgilia, with the star trembling on her brow, steals silently upon the scene ; the groups melt singly one by one before her ; in mild abstraction moving on, the music falls to melancholy tune, the dances languish, the dancers droop and draw away ; she joins the new ring, only to find herself freshly forsaken and apart ; she follows the clusters round the hall ; each time they separate and disappear, and leave her there alone. She goes out. Again, the star on her forehead bickering back the ray of the taper she bears, she traverses at night the long dungeon-corridors : conspirators whisper there ; but as she passes, they lose their courage and their will, and creep away as if awed,

and conscious of the approach of a greater crime than theirs ; she emerges into a wider way, and sets down the light,— all this blackness, these moans, these clanking chains, evoked by a power as easily quenched as this tiny flame,— she extinguishes the taper. And then she sacrifices at the altar, and the fire goes out. Here Virgilia wavers, and here Aurelius comes. She is present when he is received at court with haughty disfavor and disdain. They meet as the monarch withdraws, and he bends before her, overcome with sudden delight ; for hitherto his heart has burned with no fire but that of pure patriotism. It is in the moonlit garden again that Aurelius talks with his friend ; of too facile nature to breast the hour's displeasure, he finds other satisfactions ; he has no fancy for imperial favors, nor for the luxuries of courts ; never will he promote discord through ambition ; these dark hints, wherein so much is offered,

loyal to the heart's core, he spurns,—glory forever plays along his sword-blade; he will away to the frontier and serve his country as he may by tossing back the wild waves of the barbarian hordes. Lofty as valiant he builds up his dream,—and here, far down across the bottom of the garden, Virgilia is seen to flit, turning, upon the two, eyes of glad vengeful triumph, and, still clutched with the nervous intensity of the deed, distinct against her white raiment is the reddened dagger. There follow stormy scenes of alarum, of confusion, of coronation. By night again, Virgilia in her wild unrest paces the garden-walks, the silver star no longer shining on her forehead, but all her dark unfileted hair streaming loose over the white shawl that wraps her white array. To her enters Aurelius crowned. Art does her most to beautify the scene, with late moonrise, urns of flowers, plash of fountains, and far-away slow rise and fall of music.

The sense of night is perfect, and so the sense of love in the two figures that draw near each other, for Virgilia meets him as if the god had come to demand her worship. He holds her hands, in brief terms speaks, asks her to strengthen his throne, lifts the crown from his head, and suffers it to fall on hers. Was it for this! For power, for empery, for herself, had she done that deed? The thought of her possible share in its gain had never before occurred; she wrings the detestable hand as if to tear its act away with it, her blood boils in her veins, she dashes down the crown, and the splendid bawble spins along the ground. But he loves, Aurelius loves her! And what vile thing is this which she has made herself, which she has made the soul his love embraces! Beneath her raiment still lurks the knife. Let her die here and now, on his heart! Just then a little page trips through the gardens, tin-

kling his lute, and singing cheerily some
verse whose refrain flows,

When souls are glad,

Then love is blest,

When souls are sad,

Then love is best.

For in the grave love lives not,

Death takes, but gives not.

Aurelius breathes some ardent word, his vows
protest, his arms await. Then love is best,—
she says. She turns upon him, and looks him
through and through; she raises the crown
and invests him with it anew. Her work, he
is, her triumph,—joy surges up to her lips
in proud glad words, his love completes it in
delicate and tender passion; they go in, and
the place opens out to a hall of revelry.
When next Virgilia comes upon the scene,
she trails imperial purple, and a band of
cameos binds the blackness of her hair; she
is flushed with regnant pride and the sweet

taste of authority, but ever and anon throws anxious glances after her lord as he moves among their guests; for the retributive Fates tread swift behind. At length seating herself, she beckons him to her side. But looking down when nigh, he murmurs, with a start, that there is blood upon his throne. She retorts in the same key, by asking if one who wades ankle-deep in battle-fields need shiver at a drop dried on his chair. He would seat himself, but is hindered by that which glides in and occupies it first,—the phantom of the murdered Emperor. She offers him her hand for aid, he shrinks as if he saw a stain upon it. For all these things, happening to him instead of her, are but the bodily projection of his wife's guilt slowly making itself visible. Yet he does not so reason, but, weakened by the recurring surprises, he begins to question if he himself be not the culprit; he doubts if it was vehement-

ly that he repulsed those first dark overtures ; his eye is ever distraught, his attention forced, his breath a weary sigh ; his government goes wrong, confusion reigns in his provinces, a power built upon tyrannicide itself wields an insupportable sceptre, couriers enter his presence only to announce misfortune, his health gives way, his brain reels, — and Virgilia follows him like a shadow. At length, in the same garden that saw her first conception of crime, that she crossed upon its execution, in which she took up her destiny, Aurelius comes, while distant thunders roll and blue lightnings flash their blades down the darkness of the trees, — he comes and asks if it can be possible that in some mad and forgotten moment, some lapse of the intellect, some delirium, if in his sleep, it can be possible he took his sovereign's life, — for loyalty was the breath of the being of Aurelius. And he cries out that he loathes himself, loathes the flesh

that so has sinned. The bolt has fallen. Fate has overcome Virgilia ; her work follows her. He maddens with this belief, and to undeceive him is to die. Hating himself, how would he abhor her ! Could she bear it ? His love,— can she lose it ? His love ! she has lost it already ; it is not she that possesses it, but the false, false image of her in his heart. Her mind wanders back and lingers on the dreadful deed, her hands upon her temples, her wild eyes full of terror, “ His old white hair,” she mutters. But here a band of gay maskers with torches and lutes troop through the distance, evading the advancing storm, their gayety throwing out the tragedy of these two figures. Virgilia glances at her Emperor where he has sunk upon one knee with the groan escaping him, takes her resolve, and gives him one last look, tender, pitying, passionate, a look as if it were a wife’s embrace. Then going to him, she asks,

with one hand upon his shoulder, what is his idle fancy. He only murmurs the old Emperor's name. She recoils a moment from the ghastly fire that seems for one breath to wrap the world, and then replies.

“The Emperor? Hark, — I slew him.”

“Virgilia! — thou?”

“I. And I keep the dagger for myself!” drawing it from beneath her robes. “A good deed! Rome's salvation!”

“Wretch! Thy father!”

“Nay — I — slew him.”

“Virgilia — thou —” he reiterates, and it is all he says. But reason has returned and thrown her light upon the past; he does not doubt. He trembles away from her touch; his eyes meet hers, as if their horror and disgust were death-strokes. Remorse, despair, agonize her frame. She shudders to his feet, the dagger in her heart, wreathing one arm about his knee, and sighing, “I — for I loved

thee." A hollow roar of thunder tears the air, sudden blackness sheets the place, and far away the mailed sentinel at the gate catches the distant watch-word, and, repeating, cries, "All 's well."

There was incident, side-plot, by-play, in the thing, there were points and room for power; but to Ruth it consisted only of a succession of startling and perfect figures, each one in geste and deed, in fold and curve, a statuesque study infiltrated and permeated with a glow of passion and abandon, and all of them Charmian.

Ruth returned with Madame Saratov and her court, dissolved in dreaming. They were all in a state of dilettante rapture, which must have mightily pleased Azarian. Madame Saratov was kindly eager that Ruth should stay and sup; the boys, clinging round her, could take no denial; but Azarian, with a novel regard for her health, would not hear

of it; and though they were bringing in the dishes that sent their appetizing smoke before them, and though to fasting Ruth, if one will pardon her, the crisp turn of the broiled teal, — Azarian's shooting, — the faint vanilla odors and cinnamon flavors, the strengthening aroma of the coffee, were tempting enough, she opposed no objection, and was hurried off, — for her lover was to return, after his farewell and imperative injunction that she should immediately seek her pillow.

But no pillow did Ruth visit that night. She was fired with joyous excitement. And the dawn-light saw her still bending over her scattered sheets and pencils. Then at last she slept, — one of those sweet sleeps that follow accomplishment, haunted by noiseless dreams, outlines of glorious and unattainable beauty ever rhythmically sequent, and filled, by the keen sunshine sifting through her lids, with colors of flame and light, — sleep deep, bliss-

ful, and oblivious. Such sweet and fiery fervor of work and such intoxicating reaction dulled half the edge of Azarian's treatment, when they could be had. He would have reprobated them much, but in fact to them he owed it that his doom did not envelop him sooner. Later that day a publisher for these drawings was obtained, and the next week found wonderful etchings in all the windows, mere contours with scarcely a hint of shadow, but beautiful as the dreams themselves. Whether when wandering with the virgin star of her innocence trembling on her forehead ; when flashing across the garden's foot, the weapon in her hand ; when flushed with imperial sway, moving among her maidens, the white throat swelling proudly outward like a swan's ; when followed by the vague train of the retributive Fates ; when vainly essaying to lift a heavy heart in prayer ; when rising from despair into a radiant sudden swift-flying hap-

piness that transformed her face into miracles of splendor ; in that wild moment of woe when she sees the impress of her crime on him she loves ; in that awful one when she looks face to face with the Nemesis ; or when at last fallen at her husband's feet, shrouded in the heavy masses of drapery that swirl and slowly settle round her, the white uplifted arm alone left clinging to life,— all lovely as sculpture, all perfect as pure form could be, all full of the vivid fire of art that moulds clay and makes it something imperishable, all as if the lost Pleiad were picturing her path, and all drawn with a clarity of line, with a nerve and vigor, as if a diamond had etched them upon crystal. If Charmian's fame had last week been insecure, to-day it was fixed as the stars.

Azarian was in a rare rage when he came in one morning with a handful of them, and the only reason that the plate was not de-

stroyed was because it had passed beyond her power. He insisted that she should go out with him and ascertain if that were really so ; and when they returned, they found the room steeped in fragrance and fairly sown with flowers,—chairs, tables, vases, books, and carpet, all astrew,—great wide-blown exotics in deep shades and powerful contrasts, and the soul dying out of them in strong sweet odors that took the delighted breath away. Ruth kissed the broad petals as she caught them up in her hand,—she knew well where they came from. Had Azarian known, the window would have found their passage to the street. As it was, he watched her put the thirsty stems to drink, all but those white ones hanging about her father's chair,—those staid as Charmian placed them ; if he caught her lip quivering, in this ruffled state of his feathers it was pleasant as an evidence of his power,—compassion was foreign to the soul

of Azarian. Then he anathematized Ruth, time, and his patients, and was off; nor did he condescend to present himself again for a dozen days, partly from convenience, partly on account of other pleasures, partly in chastisement for her great misdeemeanor. Meantime, of course, Ruth worked, and meantime worked in vain; for though, in its first flush, Love had enriched her as a June sun enriches the blossoming mould, of late it had abstracted life and strength; the other's faithlessness prevented its being the ambient atmosphere in which she moved; it had come to be but a mere outgrowth of her own soul, fed from a chilled and half-exhausted soil, like those lingering things, the flaunting flowers that suck the rich earth dead. Azarian had so wholly her thoughts, her dreams, and her desires, that art refused to receive the poor remainder; there was no fertility in her fancy, no color in her pencil. The only thing she did that

had a ray of the old sparkle was a stem of berries, whose scarlet juicy lights were veiled in meshes of the witch-hazel's yellow tangles ; and just as she contemplated it, on her sad face a faint smile like a moonbeam parting a vapory heaven, some one's foot bounded up the staircase, and Azarian came in.

Ruth had been trying, for discipline, to capture and tame a belief that necessity occasioned these indifferences and absences of her lover's, and, nowise self-analyzing, did not know, indeed, that she was but suffering herself to drift along this current of her hopes and fears till some certain boundary were reached,—only half felt the volcanic forces now stifled within, one day to make upheaval. As to excuses, Azarian never availed himself of them. If Ruth found fault, she was welcome to keep it ; and to some natures such lordly behavior is the pressure that still draws the streams from the deep wells in the heart.

When he entered the room, humming, as was his wont, some one of the Miltonic quatrains,

“There eternal summer dwells,
And west winds with musky wing
Round the cedar alleys fling
Nard and cassia’s balmy smells,” —

or, after a fioriture of whistling, breaking into another, —

“Oft listening how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some hoar hill
Through the high wood echoing shrill,” —

how was it possible to be angry, or to do anything but couple him with their beauty and melody? When, at length, he was ready to kiss her, and then went rattling on a gay extravagance of laughable nonsense, how could she be chiding? In fact, all Ruth had ever pretended to do was to forget the past, and let the spirit of the hour rule. *But to-day

that unsuspected little leaven was sending its fermenting bubbles upwards ; there had been a touch of indignation that she should so pour out her whole life at his feet, and he not even stoop to pick it up ; and though it vanished at sight of his face, and sound of his voice, all things leave their trace behind them.

“Very pretty,” remarked Azarian, carelessly, looking over her shoulder at the recent work.

“I have lost all my power,” she said.

“As if you ever had any ! I suppose I have absorbed it. Well, I’m willing ; are n’t you ? ”

“Yes,—if I could afford it.”

“Afford ? Do you mean to paint after—after you ’re married ? ” Even Azarian’s courage was a little staggered by his impudence.

The color flew over Ruth’s face, till it pained her. Almost a year was it since, in his first raptures, he had alluded to such a possibility.

"Well, then, you won't need the power, and I shall; because I expect to do greatly when I reach my meridian."

"Not before?" Ruth asked, archly.

"No, I despise prematurities, prodigies, excrescences of the brain, two-headed eagles"—

"Mozart, for instance."

"Exceptions prove the rule. He was n't a human being; he was a musician. Where's my violin? Why have n't I another here? I wonder who has Paganini's Tartini?"

"I guess you have."

"Mine's a Guarnerius."

"He had a living soul imprisoned in his, you know."

"Pooh! Well, you have n't such a thing as a bird-call, or a comb and a piece of paper?"

"No, you silly boy."

"Silly, eh? Allow me to observe that it is the same great principle of vibration that settled the structure of the violin. Yes, ex-

ceptions prove the rule," said Azarian, walking about with his hands in his pockets, as there was nothing else to do with them. "The mould that shaped a Pensero, at twenty, would have cracked and split to atoms with the gigantic germ of a Satan. I have a little theory to the purpose. Do you know that in August we stand in exactly the same relative position towards the sun that we do in April? But the one brings only cold showers and drifting snows, patches of blue sky and blithe promise, and it is not till the summer solstice has accumulated all the sunshine, and the earth is soaked in hoarded warmth and light, that the other gives back the fervid wealth, gilds her billowy fields of grain, and greets retiring day with ripe rich orchard-sides. So let no man audit his own accounts till he is fifty. *Tarde magna proveniunt.* As for women, let them do what they 're able whenever they can," said Azarian, with a hearty

contempt. "What do you think of that, little woman?"

"O, it's very consolatory,—especially the last. There you touch the root of all the evils. If I had been Alphonso of Castile!"

"You would have suggested—?"

"Something more radical than he dreamed of."

"A surd quantity. What might it be?"

"There never should have been a woman made!"

"Oh indeed! Wormwood and thoroughwort tea,—extract of Miss Yetton's bitterness,—which means that a man has no business to talk anything but whipt-syllabub and kisses to his little sweetheart."

"An untried experiment."

"Satirical too, by Jove!"

"Am I your little sweetheart? Do you care anything about me?" asked Ruth, under her breath, in a sweet, coaxing tone.

"I don't know. You ought to," he replied, with a blackbird's whistle, and then beginning to sing,

"But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight."

"Azarian," said Ruth, timidly, again after a moment's silence, "are you quite sure that you love me well enough to marry me?"

"If a breeze never blew, stagnation would ensue,—which is the reason, I suppose, that the best of women sometimes insist upon a fuss," he replied, wheeling round upon her. "You want we should arrive at an understanding, do you? Here we are, then. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came. You've been imposed upon, neglected, and abused. If you please," with a wave of the hand. "You've been sacrificed to selfish pleasures. You've been left to pine alone. I received your happiness in charge, and take no care of it whatever. You weary of your one-sided

affair, in which you give all, and my commodities do not meet your wants. Yet you started with your eyes open. I never condescended to a concealment. If you were but once well out of the scrape!"

"O no, no, Azarian," sobbed little Ruth, her head on the table.

"No? Then come kiss your heartless wretch, and be still. What, turned over a new leaf and blotting it already? We may as well have it out," said Azarian, with a fresh inflection for every sentence. He took her hand, but apparently in a purely medical capacity,—as the surgeon keeps his finger on the vein, in the hall of torture,—and, holding it, continued. "Every man has a wife, therefore I. Black moments visit all, then all need a fireside; better at such times the corner of a workhouse chimney, where faces are, than a lonely den, albeit luxurious, where they are not. You bewitched me once; and

when the thrall loosened, I saw this. You remember they say those old statues, those faultless forms, those Grecian women of idealized bodies, can have no soul,—the physical perfected at expense of the intellect. Look at an outline here, Ruth," and his face made a silhouette against the deep noon light. "Pure Greek. Can the Apollo have a heart? You will make the wife I wish,—quiet, docile, submissive,—power enough to aid, grace enough for a companion, tact enough to let alone and wait when unrequired,—qualities I might seek far, and not find in another. To pretend myself to be madly in love would be ridiculous; but to separate from you would occasion me more inquietude than I care to encounter."

A slow indignation and amazement were burning Ruth up. "You have said it all, sir!" said she, half rising, and trying to tear away her hand. "Everything is over between

• us. I never, never will be that wife, so help me" —

"Take care, little one. You will only eat your words. You will be my wife, and you know it. We are bound, God sees why, by indissoluble ties, and you feel them. In reality, we are almost one now, or I could not treat you so, as if you were a part of me to agitate as I pleased. You are promised me; you are mine; I never, never will give you back that promise, so help me — what did n't help you. Rock your heart to rest,— 't is a troublesome little atom,— and don't interrupt the oracle. Sit down, Ruth. Indeed, I could n't let you go. If no other lover ever addressed a woman so, it is because no other lover ever relied on the woman's intelligence so — entirely — as I do. The wives of men of genius must not expect the tranquil existence of those who marry poodles. The husband always waxes the friend; yours has done so a trifle

sooner than ordinary. Take the goods the gods provide. Be content with being allowed so to lavish yourself on me, Ruth ;— some day, perhaps,— on my death-bed,— I shall look up and understand it all and return it. Fluttering little pulse, be still, be still. When we are married next June, remember these things, and don't exact too much of me, and you can make yourself quite comfortable."

Ruth essayed to subdue the riot within her; but when they had been quiet for a time, it all bubbled up anew at his calm tones.

"It's a fallacy that women are lovely in tears"—

"I'm not crying," murmured Ruth, stoutly, in the very face of a plunging shower.

"Who said you were ?" laughed Azarian. "I merely advanced a general apothegm. You are the girl in the fairy-tale whose mouth dropped roses, and whose eyes dropped—I

suppose you call this a brilliant," looking at something fallen brightly on his cuff. "In that case, how royally besprent shall I be! But in the other,— if I put up an umbrella,— ah! here comes the sun!" For Ruth's laugh set her eyelashes a-glitter.

"It could n't be," said she, "that one was the least bit dearer than you knew"—

"Why could n't it be? Let us cherish the kind illusion. My little girl, perhaps, after all, there is a seedling of love deep down under my rubbish, which, in a desire to be plain, I have not given credit for. Ruth, accept your fate."

"Dear Azarian," said she, trying hard to keep her voice steady, "I am sorry I spoke so then"—

"Nonsense! I like one best with a trifle of spirit."

"I—I want to do what is best for you. If you should really meet the woman who was

all to you that you are to me, by and by, when too late"—

"It would never be too late for me."

"But it would be for me!" said Ruth, dismayed.

"O, I thought you were regarding another. For you, nobody can decide so well as yourself. Now go bathe your eyes in rose-water."

"I have n't any."

"Then I must kiss them dry. How do tears taste, Ruth?"

"Salt!"

"Salt, bitter salt, as who should know better.—Lucky leech that I am! There, dissolve that powder in something, and wet your angry lids. That soothes, and prevents my delay. Kissing is not the end of life, Ruth."

"What is?"

"Now you're to go with me, and dine at Madame Saratov's."

And free confession being good for the soul, Azarian, in his blithest mood that night, looked many a time at Ruth, who, stung to brilliancy, so sparkled that he congratulated himself on his day's work.

Madame Saratov kept Ruth that evening after they were all gone, spread a little cot for her in a closet adjoining her own room, b~~l~~ Isa to comb out her braids, and when they were both whitely arrayed for the night, sitting before the fire in embowering arm-chairs, their feet lost in the pile of crimson cushions, idly tasting their spicy sangarees, all in a state of more luxury than Ruth could have contrived with the money, and that the other contrived without, just on the indolent somnolent dreamy verge, in that deep rich light and warmth, with the late hour tolled out by silver stroke of distant bells, Madame Saratov read her the second lesson of the day.

"My dear," said she, "you wear a ring on

your first finger, which, en passant, nobody but shoemakers' brides do in Europe."

"But everybody does in America. Azarian says it is a national custom here, and so he likes it. You don't want to wear the ring on your heart-finger till it is put on never to come off, you know."

"You are one sentimental elf. And, moreover, if you understood yourself, would not so feel. Love is terribly serious, whereas you talk as if it were play."

"Terribly serious," said Ruth, with a sigh.

"Yes,—a tragedy most often. De vous à moi,—women must have excitement, so they find their pleasure in it. They act, these good women who won't go to the play! It imports nothing, à ce compte-là, on which finger the ring is worn, l'index ou l'annulaire."

"I will tell you a little secret. This is not my engagement-ring; Azarian never gave me one. It is Charmian's. She could n't

see which finger it slipt over; so I let it stay."

"The Charmian! You knew her, then, before those pictures, you demure frileuse?"

"Azarian does not like her."

"Hm! C'est cela,—I see." And Madame Saratov did not suspect that her clear sight was sharpened by a certain portrait of herself which Azarian had lately sketched and suffered her to behold half done, without its final touches of tint and tone, its masque of shapely smiles and curves and rounded color, and where, though her acquaintance might not acknowledge it, she found fearful resemblance. "But rings are neither here nor there. I intimate the fact behind, the betrothal. Now will you tell me as your friend, as one who has had of experience, who sees that you do need help,—it pains me the heart, as to a kind woman,—why you marry? Is it that you tire of work, that you want a—what is

this you call it — home, that the families arranged it, that you find yourself entrapped, that, as your poet says, returning were as tedious as laisser aller, — because you are ambitious, because ” —

“ O Madame Saratov, because, because I love him ! ”

“ Pauvre petite ! ”

There was a world of meaning in the intonation and the silence. It was beneath Ruth's dignity to answer its aspersion. She clad her lip with a smile's disguise.

“ You marry him, then, because you love him. Les roses tombent, les épines restent,” she hummed. “ And he, — does he love you ? ”

If Ruth had risen in her little white wrath, she would have cut a very ridiculous figure. It was, besides, too late an hour for her to leave shelter.

“ Pardon, mille fois,” said Madame Sara-

tov, reaching across and putting her warm hand on the cold and slender arm. "I wish to make you a difficult service. You will hate me, détest me, yet you will have me to thank."

"I appreciate the wish; but I do not need the service," replied Ruth, proudly. "Nobody can help me," was what she sighed to herself.

"Qu'il est difficile to accept! Well, let us fórgét," said Madame Saratov, tossing her wine into the grate, where it flashed up the chimney in a blue fury of fire. "The fact is," said she, leaning back once more, and fixing her eyes on the pale gold of the faded ferns that crowned the turquoise vase aloft on the bracket, "I remember me, in my life, of some men, the very imps and sprites of self, whose ruin marriage would complete; they were assez intéressés, assez despotiques, les tyra-neaux, before; from the moment the wife

devoted becomes their slave, their doom is upon them. I would never adjure a woman to reject them by her own hope of any happiness, but by her desire for their salvation. True marriage, my dear girl," said she, turning towards Ruth her blue eyes that glowed at will, "ennobles, purifies, elevates ; but how can a marriage be true that is all on one side, — where one loves and the other, tout agréablement, endures ? "

" Madame Saratov, I see what you mean ; yet marriage is the natural condition of maturity ; even a bad and selfish man must therefore be a better one if he has a wife. If it were question with me," said Ruth, with burning cheeks, " of marrying such a man as those you knew, I should feel, when the dazzle of his days was off, how dull and dreary would they wear away. I would bide my time, I would marry him, serve him, cheer him, be his slave ! "

“ Doubtless you would be happy in some sort. Women reap the glorious joy of martyrs. Mais lui ? ”

“ That is beyond my province.”

“ Certes ! In crossing this slack-rope of life, you would declare, it suffices to attend one’s own steps.”

“ No,” said Ruth, falteringly. “ I say that birth and death and marriage are three great sacraments, and, partaking them, in neither has any one the power to interfere or oppose a will.”

“ Fataliste ! ” exclaimed Madame Saratov, with a laugh. “ Years of discretion, adieu ! What boon to distressed suitors ! Love tilts à outrance, and borrows the weapons of reason ! — But to what end ? C'est un cercle vicieux,” said she, rising, and standing with her beautiful arm along the black marble of the mantel. “ One is married and done with ; when life shall go to close, the sacrifice it has

demanded may have stripped off all grossness, and one soars. But he ? ” said Madame Saratov, her head upon her hand, and her voice taking a dreamy tone as she fell into reverie. “ One has so served him that he failed to serve himself ; he has attained no height in this life, and, shuddering out into the blackness, a poor, pitiful, naked thing at last, what can his pampered, stifled, degraded soul do but stagger down, down ” —

Ruth rose, too, and her little foot scattered the crimson cushions with vehemence.

“ Madame Saratov, if you play with fire, you will be burned ! ” said she.

The lady started. “ Qu’as-tu ? What have I done ? ” she cried. “ Trespassed on forbidden borders ? Do you know,” she asked, raising her eyebrows with sudden thought-dissipating effect, “ how they used to fix the landmarks in Germany ? Take the children to the spot and box their ears there. You are

not so cruel, ma petite dédaigneuse ? Nay, but I pray thee of thy clemency ! that she would go but to smile, and sonner l'angélus ! Forgiven, then, at last ? Let us see how the night goes à la belle étoile,” said she, drawing the unwilling Ruth with her to the window, “Ah ! what a mite you are !” and pulling aside the curtain. “How white the moonlight wraps the town ! It is like an emanation from all the sleep. How sublime is this sleep ! — the way in which man trusts the forces to do without him,— the careless reliance that by daybreak the world will have rolled round to morning. Striking one. It seems to me at night as if the stars struck the hours. How that spire points upward, and leads the prayer !

‘ Vous qui pleurez, venez à ce Dieu, car il pleure.

Vous qui souffrez, venez à lui, car il guérit.

Vous qui tremblez, venez à lui, car il sourit.

Vous qui passez, venez à lui, car il demeure.’ ”

And Madame Saratov gave Ruth one of those lingering kisses which some women have the assurance to impress, and betook herself to her prie-dieu, at which,—as Ruth watched her from a dreamless pillow,—in her own way, she seemed to find satisfaction.

Night is long at that season, and Ruth did not slumber; yet as the white light stole into her closet, she had no desire to rise; she would have liked to lie forever there in the soft scented sheets, on the richly-laced pillow; she folded her feet and her hands, she fancied herself to be dead. But when, at a much later hour, Madame Saratov looked in with a laugh, she lay there at length wrapped in sleep, white, motionless, and perfect, like the pallid sculpture on a tomb. It was after a long dream that she stirred, and Isa stood beside her with a cup dispersing cordial odors. “Madame make it for Mamselle,” the maiden declared, “and she smile to herself all the

time she vas do it." And with a fresh vigor coursing through every limb, Ruth performed her toilette ; felt what a different being such daily trifling care would make her ; descending, found that Madame Saratov, in a fit of compunction, had sent round for Azarian ; and made her breakfast with them as lightly as if no cruel purpose had essayed to set its crystal in the night-time. Then she hastened to give her hostess a little lesson,— a lesson never finished, because Azarian had brought to them a book of his, and from it read aloud,— Maud, — that fire-opal distilled to melody. After which he departed upon his engagements, and she, with the sweet sounds still singing in her head, hastened home—fearful that she had been wanting on the night before— to choose for Madame Saratov her finest boards, her purest tints, and in a book containing every charm to illustrate the Garden-Song.

IV.

BUT as soon as she had fairly caught her fancies, Ruth became absorbed in them so earnestly as half to dwarf both consciousness and reflection ; she expended herself in lettering the text, with twisting vines, wings, petals, and floral charactery of form and hue exquisite as the work of some old monk in his cell, in pages full of all the rich confusion of fragrance and bloom sealed in the verse,— one leaf a single listening lily,—another, the little foot-print that the March wind had set in tufts of bluest violets,— a third, a mass and strew and tangle of flowers, as if thrown down from a tired hand with the dew yet trembling on their sprays,— here and there dainty vignettes,— just a bough with its waking bird

and setting moon, entwined by rose and jas-
mine, and signed at foot with graceful inter-
mixture of the curves of violin and bassoon,—
the simple gateway wound in woodbine, and
far off, a mere outline among the curling
clouds, the black bat hastening away,— the
planet fainting on its daffodil sky,— the old
grave thrilled and blossoming out in purple
and red,— the two lovers met at last in each
other's arms. When it was over, and the fe-
ver of design had faded, “Ah, well,” sighed
Ruth to herself, “what have artists to do with
love? I was happy while I did that.” But
happy or not, its fire had burned out her
strength; she could do no more. “I wish,
I wish,” said little Ruth, “that I had some-
body to take care of me!”

Azarian had dropped in once or twice since
she began the opuscule; no doubt he had
intended to come oftener, had not some new
thing interfered,— it took only trifles to de-

tach the last impression from Azarian ; and Ruth, having put other things out of mind with all her might, had nothing but her work to talk about, and with that she had wished to surprise him, and therefore afforded small entertainment. Still, what lover needs that his mistress should speak in order to please ?

Ruth, through her work, had been innocently dallying with fate ; she had given herself brief reprieve, in vague hope of full remission. "In this fortnight," she had thought, "he may find that he needs me."

But it was not in that fortnight that Azarian found it.

The lonely child waited a day or two in order to please this lover with her book ; but he did not come ; and knowing that it would please him equally well at Madame Saratov's, and probably much sooner, she sallied forth with it,—first looking in at the print-shop to find her things undisturbed in their portfolio,

and no balance in her favor. The salesman assured her they would disappear in time ; but time meant existence itself to Ruth, who had not breakfasted that morning.

It was by some oversight that Isa suffered Ruth to enter without announcing her.

Madame Saratov, clad in her gown of green Genoa velvet, and the golden coil of her hair behind wreathed round with slender peacock feathers of gorgeous green and gold, stood and held aloft in her hand a vase, the white Witch vase. "It should have a jewelled tripod!" she was exclaiming.

"It has it now," said Azarian, who had been sitting on a cushion near her feet, and still retained his position. "Always hold it, Bacchante ! it is for you !" fascinated in her not at all just then as a woman, but suddenly seized with the sense of her artistic faultlessness. "As near Heaven as I shall ever reach, on the whole."

" You make me of compliments all the days ! For me ? " And Madame Saratov slowly turned and laid her eyes upon him. " This one ouvrage, this finiment of your life ? Is it that a lover does not lay such result at his lady's feet ? For me ? Pourquoi pas pour elle ? — No, no," she added, instantly and depreciatingly, with a wave of the other hand. " It is as if a moonbeam had carved it on snow. I shall keep it forever as the treasure of my house. C'est divin, mais " —

" Was Madame exiled," said Azarian, coolly, " for an insane interest in other people's affairs ? "

Madame Saratov laughed, and took a step towards him. " Bien ! " said she. " I confess the impeachment. It affords me opportunity, de plus. Do you know that somebody's body is wearing so thin that the soul arrives to look through ? I spoke with her not long ago, I, your poor slave, sir ! " beating her foot

on the carpet. “ She was impenetrable as a little gem. Monsieur, my good friend Azarian, if you love the child, why do you neglect her so ? If you have need of her, why do you break her heart ? ”

If Madame Saratov had looked in Azarian’s face as he lifted his length, she might not have dared to continue. It was quite as well, though, for the anger passed like all his other flashes ; and when she raised her glance, he wore the old mocking smile and witty bravado.

“ I don’t know that I do need her ! ” said he.

Just then a hand was laid upon his arm. The vase dropped from Madame Saratov’s grasp, and fell in twenty pieces on the floor. Ruth, in hesitation, had come gliding across the room, and round the open screen of rosy damask, in time to hear this last. With a little cry, she stooped to gather the fragments.

Madame Saratov was in despair. A thunder-cloud charged with lightning swept across Azarian's brow and was gone ; he dropped the black fringes over his luminous eyes, and then laughed. " So much for lying. Ci-gît," said he. " Isa, here are some crumbs of the bread of life for you to sweep up.—How is my little maid this morning ? "

" I am so sorry, Azarian. It was quite my fault. I could n't find my voice " —

" Not at all. She was getting up a scene," he said, in a stage-whisper, indicating the other lady.

" How can he forgive me ! " exclaimed Madame Saratov, in her guilt, her hands upon her face.

" By commencing another straightway. We won't make it wearisome. Ruth, what affair is that ? "

Ruth laid her gift upon a table,—it was too insignificant to repair such disaster,—then

came to him and murmured, “I should like to see you, if you please, this evening.”

He looked down on her white face, her dark beseeching eyes, he did not wish to be reproached, they steeled him. Moreover, had not the accident come through her means?

“Very well, perhaps so,” said he.

“No, but certainly, dear. It is as much as life or death,” she urged, almost inaudibly.

“Send for the doctor, quick,—a pill,—we’ll have a dose of calomel?”

“Azarian”—

“Well, I’ll see. Perhaps so,” possessing himself of the little book. “Ah! what have we here? ‘Apples of Syria and Turkish quinces, and mountain peaches, and jasmine, and Syrian lotus-roots, and myrobalans of Uklamon, and hill citrons, and Sooltan oranges, and sweet-scented myrtle, and camomile, and anemonies, and violets, and pomegranate-flowers, and narcissus-blossoms, and put the

whole down into the porter's hamper,'" quoted the Panjandrum. "By Jove, that is delicious! Wipe your weeping eyes, my friend, and be charmed."

"There are three minutes that I have destroyed the most perfect, the most priceless—and he asks me to amuse myself!" cried Madame Saratov.

"Madame must not concern herself," exclaimed Azarian. "She ought to know me well enough by this time never to afford credence to a word I say. I have at home, believe me, at least a dozen, equally priceless, more perfect."

"Ah, yes, I believe you,—in splinters!"

"Come. I fancy you have done me immense service. I gloated over the thing. Now, if the fates conspire, I may produce indeed. You establish an era."

"You are very philosophic. But all calm as you are"—

“It seems to me, if I had received such illustrations to the Garden-Song as these, I should not sit with my face in my hands.”

“Azarian, dear !”

“My little Ruth, ma douce consolatrice !”

“There’s jasmine for you ! Ah ! that acacia stifles one, it is so sweet. What a passion-flower ! it is full of torrid life, with its spikes and anthers ; it is the soul of the glowing East ; I seem to see it sprawling over the swart sands ! When the new earth is made, Ruth, you will have to be taken into the councils. But that is a pretty notion,—the light falling from above on the little head with its gloss of curls, and just the outline of the brow begun. You are a genius, Ruth !—The power’s not all lost, is it ? I have n’t absorbed it all, eh, Ruth ?” and he looked down askance where she sat behind him on the hassock, the sudden pleased red on her forgetful cheek, her eyes and her instant smile full of the sun-

light that, stealing in through the crevice of a parting curtain, gilded the stray locks about her face, heightened her color, and overlaid her. He reached back his hand and placed it on her hair a moment, then returned to the pictures. The sunbeam went, the smile went too. Ruth rose, saying drearily to herself that it was going to rain, as outward things affect one mechanically after any blow. She hung a second on Azarian's arm. The pretty work, the pretty smile, had melted his rigor. "You are going?" said he. "Well, then, expect me for sentence this evening."

"Surely, Azarian?"

"So sure as twilight. Nay, shall I swear it, doubter? The angel records an oath in Heaven's chancery,—and blots it out with his tears, very like," he added, lightly, in undertone. "Till then!"

"Ah, mignonne, must you go? Do not bring such mischief when you come again. I

am inconsolable ! I shall not go out to dine to-day ! ”

“ Yes, you will,” said Azarian. “ For here is the carriage at the door, and you may drop my little Ruth at hers.” So he closed the panel upon them, and was away to his patients, of whom, on his rounds that day, he had made Madame Saratov one.

Ruth sat quietly opposite Madame Saratov, — who had partially forgotten her recent paroxysms, and made only comical little allusions to them,— smiled at her gay words, which seemed to strike somewhere a great way outside of her, kept herself down as if compressed by iron bonds till the carriage stopped. Then she ran breathlessly up-stairs, shut her door swiftly, and locked it, and, bursting through all her bonds, cried out in a loud voice, “ I don’t know that I do need her ! ” She fell upon the floor, hiding her face, the blank side of the universe turned upon her, utter nega-

tion, a kind of stupor. The pain passed at length, for her memory only repeated the words and drew no meaning from them. Gradually she began to feel there was something wrong ; she strove to gather calm, to obtain the upper hand of herself once more, and, when that was done, she crowded all her thoughts down, till the evening should let them rise and shake their dismal vans before Azarian's eyes.

Meanwhile Ruth turned to the wants of the day. She was faint, and needed strength. There was little left in her rooms for the pawnbroker ; she hated to denude this one further till Azarian should have come and gone ; she took some trifle, and, going out in the soft showers, disposed of it for a wherewithal to dine upon, forcing herself to eat ; but she had no longer the spur that once she had in the first blast of poverty ; each time the process grew more insupportable ; and,

so humble to Azarian that, in order to keep upright, she must needs be proud to all the world beside, she thought she would sooner starve than resort to such method again. Later in the day, she busied herself putting the place into the most exquisite order; — a little basket of grapes that some unknown one had sent her she would not touch, — grapes will not keep one alive, — saving them for the evening; but, directly, she saw in that very act a hope, and impetuously dashed them out of the window, where a parcel of young ragamuffins seized upon them as the generous bounty of the skies.

Ever since that night with Madame Saratov, ever since that noon with Azarian, Ruth had indistinctly meant to assert herself, — yet had postponed the evil day. She had scarcely dared to do more than dream of parting, — that so sucks the strength out of the future, and suffocates the soul beneath the accumu-

lation of the past. She still held faint pallid pictures of the long life with him, even if it were sacrificed to him ; she had thought of a hearth almost happy ; she had suffered somewhere in the inmost recesses a thrilling hope, unwhispered, unheard, of the ruddy firelight playing on little heads, each one of which should wear his brow, his eyes, should make her dearer, should win him nearer ; she had an insight of that advancing hour that none but she could soothe ; she sought with all the wild rushing of her love to be the one to lead him upward, to do him loyal service ; she abased herself in her thought and put her heart beneath his feet,—her whole nature suddenly went out to him in clamorous longing. And then again those words of the morning fell on her like ice-drops ; she bent her head in a storm of tears, and when they cleared, though she had never written him word or message before, she found herself pencilling

along her drawing-paper, “Till you need me, Azarian,— till you need me.” She wanted to be the whole world to him. She found herself almost nothing. Something must be done that evening; it was right for no love to continue on such ignoble terms!

Poor little Ruth thought then all had reached an end. She did not know how deeply she was cherishing yet one last hope, until the twilight passed and he had not come. She sat at the window after the dark had fallen, straining her gaze as she searched the long, wide, lonely square, where the gas-light flickered in the wind and laid its fickle lustre in the black and shallow pools. The rain lashed along the pane, the gale sighed and sobbed about the house or mounted and shook the casement and lulled away again, the great shadow stretched along the earth and grew deeper and immense,—no one came. A wild wet night,—few braved it, few trav-

ersed the spot ; all were housed with their homes, their friends, their fires.—A stir without in the solitary space. Was it a footfall ? the spark of a cigar ? the long lessening shadow,—that was he ! She ran to light her candle, to compose her dress ; she waited with her breath between her teeth for the hall-door to slam. All was silent ; there came no sound, no turning lock, no step on the stair, no shaking off of the rain,—her heart sank down a sickening gulf ; she blew out the light again.

A long hour full of keen quick pangs,—ah ! who has not known them, the heat tearing up and down the veins, the quenching hopes, the wild despair ?—The clock struck, tolled out remorselessly its nine iron strokes ; it would soon be too late to expect him ; eagerness, impatience, fear, all fevered her, her pulses began to throb with liquid fire. She had so determined that he would come, so set her heart upon it, if he loved her in the

least it would be impossible he should fail. Ah ! how dismal it looks ! she thought,—coming from delightsome places, no wonder he will not want to stay. There was yet some coal in her grate, laid in the spring and unkindled during all the summer ; she touched a match to the wisp of paper beneath, and sent its crackle and sparkle up the chimney till they fell to a soft deep blaze, where the colored exhalations of liquefient jewels seemed to stir and hover. How warm the room was then ! She threw up the window, and leaned out into the southerly gale ; the rain beat upon her temples and cooled them ; she seemed to see forms flitting far down the distance ; could that be — was — ah, no ! only the gas-light flaring in the wind and tossing its shadows about the long, wide, lonely square. “ O Azarian, how can you treat me so ! ” she cried aloud.

One,—two,—three,—the clock was peal-

ing ten. She went for her dressing-case ; she let down her hair warm and loose in the back of her neck ; she brushed it till it tingled all through its length with fires and darks, till her head burned and her brain grew clear. He would come yet, she insisted, she was positive of it.

There rose the noise of wheels,—ah ! to be sure,—he had been detained, and would not walk in all the storm. She twisted the tresses into a knot, her heart shook the chair that held her ; she forgot reproach, separation ; she sprang to meet him with passionate welcome, —swiftly and indifferently the coach rolled by. Others followed ; they returned from the theatres ; none of them knew of the tragedy in the life of the little girl up there in the blazing window. She had been so confident, that the reverse shocked her stiff ; she leaned there, and in the last fierce shower of the breaking tempest let the rain-torrents dash about her.

Perhaps he would not come at all ; the doubt was so like certainty that it swallowed breath and palpitation.

There he was at last ! Why had she lost the step ? Life and strength and joy surged up again at the sound. The key rattled in the door. He would be here after an instant. How he would come in, in his gay way, saying not a word, cheeks flushed with the weather, eyes shining beneath the brim slouched like a brigand's, open his arms, his great shaggy coat, shut her in under all the rain-drops, feel her heart beating, kiss her first on the forehead,—her face was aglow with smiles,—and all the night's tumult for nothing —.

And then the heavy step of a lodger passed her door and went higher.

She flashed the window down, she walked the room like one caged, she held her hands tightly griped that she might not wring them.

How the minutes dragg'd and dragg'd and

dragged. Eleven o'clock. She would not look for him again ; it would be of no use if he did come ; it would be only to say good night ; but oh what cheer in the sound of that single word ! She would go to bed, but she could not sleep. The next step found her at the window, peering through the pane, out where the desolate lamp flung about its wild shadows on the glowering darkness, where the drops yet pattered from the boughs, dripped from the eaves, and the tossing flashes lit up the emptiness of the great lonely square.

There was no more rain ; the warm wind had risen and sent the scudding clouds to sea in tattered shreds ; here and there a star appeared, mild and hazy, like soft summer stars ; it was the dawn of the Indian summer of the year. But Ruth felt as though never again for her would there be any summer in the soul. All the sudden swift anticipations that had met her with shining faces, like glorious

ghosts, had turned their backs upon her in flying,—black disappointments. They were but trifles,—yet what sorrow they drew in their train, what mood of anguish they super-induced! Hot, parched, weary work, over at length; the eyes ached, the cheeks had left burning, the hands were cold and wet, the nerves were all aslack. Her heart felt too heavy to flutter any more.

Twelve o'clock of a starlight night. She had ceased to expect him now; but it had all passed beyond her control, and still she sat there. They that have looked for one who came not, and on whom their very life hung, know what a vigil was that.

Ruth may have slept in her chair at last, for when she looked up again, the day was breaking, breaking over the house-tops in its deep tender prime. Whoever has known that perfect hour in the country can still feel its

spell in the city, when far and near the wide firmament broods over its soft dream of light. But Ruth felt nothing, remembered nothing, just now ; she only saw down the gap of a street the morning star sinking back like a great watery chrysolite and melting in depths of golden vapor ; she had a vague feeling that it was her own being dissolving there in the red fumes of the sun, till suddenly she recalled the chrysolite upon her finger, and all the turmoil and passion of the night rose with it. But she was too weary for any thought ; things passed before her eyes, and made their own impression ; she had not even the volition to receive them. She saw all the roofs lie dark and glittering in the gray with their wet slopes, then steam in censers of curling filmy threads ; one spire studded its base with rubies, just above great pearly clouds flocked and floated on, then high and clear bloomed out the faint fresh

azure ; borne on cool morning winds a rack of rosy mist soared up and sailed away, and slantwise round the corner of the eaves a sunbeam touched her face. Slowly the city began to plume itself in smoke ; Ruth watched the slender stream that left one chimney, and dissipated itself up high in the airy sparkling heaven, idly fancied the hearth far below from which it rose, the bright breakfast-table, with its cheery faces, saw by and by the children trooping forth to school, then turned her eyes inward. It was noon before she moved. She was unconscious of time, felt no hunger, forgot her toilet. All her sensations clustered at one point,—she was waiting for Azarian. The shriek of the trains swooping down upon the city had not roused her ; but here the fulgorant clangor of the great steel bells startled the air, and their reverberation seemed to shatter itself in her frame. Ruth always loved bells,—used to shiver with their slow toll,

to let the blood in her heart leap exultantly with their showering peals, felt always all attuned to the great tone that pulsed from particle to particle throughout their sonorous expanses,— so musical, so ravishing, she had wondered they should have to do with hands, — would have had them swinging, ringing, in the blue dome by unseen agencies. Now she rose, caught sight of her face in the glass, went and bathed and indued fresh raiment, lay down on her lounge and tried to sleep. Vain effort: all her love for Azarian was beating its life out wildly in her bounding heart; all her wrongs from him rushed up in wave on wave to drown the struggling passion. The greatest wrong of all made the very heart stand still; but for him she could have prayed. In this her need she could have found help. When she came to him with all her nascent faith, her holy hopes, he had laughed at them, silenced her words, stifled her thoughts. For,

whatever should be grafted on hereafter, Azarian had to-day no religious element in his nature ; his cold intellect might stand bare-headed without, and watch the sun strike up the painted windows,— he had never entered and become transmuted in the rosy warmth and amethystine glow of prayer. He had made himself the absorbent of all Ruth's power and aspiration, and in his exhausting atmosphere, if her devotion were not dead, it was at least in syncope. She could not pray ; she had lost the language ; she had made herself so remote ; she felt that there was nothing to hear her should she call. Yet had he been but constant ! Her friend, her religion, her love,— he had taken them all, prevented her power, drained her strength, and in return he had given her nothing, nothing ; he did not care for her, he had no need of her,— so little would have contented her,— such a breath of tenderness would have kept her warm,—

and thinking of these things, Ruth cried out that she was forsaken, that she was alone, that she was all alone in the world. Why did not Azarian come? There were double reasons that he should,— and those words to explain! Was it possible, was it possible that he never meant to come again? She tried to say that she wanted no return for all she gave. She tried to persuade herself that she was wrong, that he had delayed a hundred times before,— why should this once be life or death? Oh, she had made it so! It is from the spark that the forest flames. She had wrought herself to that frantic pitch that listens to nothing, to that intense state wherein one perhaps sees the truer relations of magnitudes, where nothing is small, all great. She was prostrate, and the chances swept on above, as remote from her reach as any mighty wind that roars through a black and hollow sky. All creation hung on the yea or nay of his coming.

She lay there with such a hearkening ear now as the hours wore on, flushing and paling, shaking with such great tremors, her breath like little gusts of flame, half beside herself through suffering, excitement, inanition, exhaustion, that life seemed of no worth but to keep her keenly attempered to pain. And of what worth was it? Who valued it? Nobody. Nobody in the wide world. Why should she keep it? And she turned her face to the wall.—Gently the day withdrew, strained all the golden light from its rich lees in sunset, and soft purple glooms wrapped the earth and brought the stars down nearer as one by one they trembled into life. Ruth sat up and pushed back her hair, went to the window and looked out. The perfumes of all her untended flowers floated themselves across to soothe her, but she did not regard them. A little fitful breeze tapped the bare vine-stem against the pane, but she did not let it in. Some prayer-

meeting bell was tolling seven,—she covered her ears with her hands. It was utterly impossible that she should re-enact last night ; she had neither the vigor nor the spirit for it ; she shuddered at the thought, the fear,—all her nerves were torn to pieces. What should she do ? Go out ? And perhaps miss seeing him ! Remain ? And endure the torture. She remained. Still waiting, all alert, there came across her wildness brief lulls, moments of reflection. The words of Madame Saratov rung in her remembrance : she thought if, by her untiring service, she were only to weaken and degrade his soul, would it not be best to let him leave her. “ How can I let him leave me,” she said, “ when the very fear of it gives me this agony ? I have not the strength to let him leave me,—and live. And live ? Where is the need ? Well, then, why not die ? Leave ? He has already left ! I am so tired,—O God, why don’t you take me ? ”

Suddenly Ruth sprang to her feet. Take her ? — why not go ?

Yet she trembled. — And if he came — . She stood waiting, with her hands clasped on the table before her. When the clock should strike eight — . What an eternity that was ! Sparkling on the fixed strain of the moment a thousand happy vanities started up and made darker the gloom that swallowed them. She laughed grimly at herself, and asked if every girl who lost a lover were mad as she. The question was another goad. Let her hurry to escape her humiliation ! Let her bury her sorrow and her shame out of the light ! Let her perish with it ! And then the awfulness of death smote her in the face. Here now, burning, breathing, beating, — and then ? O terrible unknown ! and then ? Coming with all her vivid life, what dreadful power was that which could give it so sudden extinction ? The white cold horror whelmed her ; yet better

that than this,—at least it would be rest. It would be brief,—and then it would be over. Her forehead was wet, her heart struck her side with blows that one could hear; still she was waiting, waiting, and all became lost in the rigidity of her purpose.

Slowly, sweetly, unconsciously, the peal parted the air, and fell, fell softly down through the listening night, lingering and loitering, and quivered into silence. Its tone still swam upon the ear when Ruth was on the pavement, flying with fleet feet to find her fate. Step after step, in some swift mechanism of violent will, on, on, rapid and sure. This was the place.

Ruth leaned a moment over the parapet; she stood and looked down into the deep dark water that lapsed along below; she seemed to see herself lying there forever sheathed in the crystal flow, looking up at soft starry heavens, all trouble dead and done with. Not far away

a boat rose and dipped, peopled with ringing voices, while its helmsman bore a torch. In travesty of all their mirth, some woman sang ; the song floated over the bay and reached her ears.

Lips that were made to sigh,—

Your bloom was bliss.

The rose fades from the sky,

From you the kiss.

Eyes that were made to weep,—

At length how blest

Soul-satisfying sleep

And dreamless rest !

Heart that was made to break,—

One pang, one breath,—

Your fluttering thrill and ache

Drop into death !

And the helmsman quenched his torch. Then, like a strain of the wide world's indifference, from another skiff that drifted down the obscure far on the hither side of the bay, an-

other voice echoed in antiphon,—some nocturn's careless lazy tune, much like the motion of the current that buoyed the singer so languidly, so graciously along.

Float, little boat, the way is dark and wide,
Float, little boat, along the sleepy tide;
Vaguely we note, we hear the distant rote
Where the great waters and the steep shores chide,—
Slowly we slide, it lulls us as we glide,

Float, little boat.

Neither could hear the other,—Ruth heard both. There was a subtle mockery in the contrasting song. She delayed till they should drop below the piers. And she looked steadily ahead far away into the low horizon that drew over the sphere's side all its heaven of dark transparency, so remote and deep, with such a lofty lucid dark that it seemed full of slumbering light. Even then, through all the madness that whirled about the fixed point of her purpose, some sense of the hour's beauty

crept into her heart, and I think that for an instant her personal misery lifted over a quick flash of gratitude for the perfect loveliness of the world. How beautiful must be the hand that made its work so fair ! It was but an instant, — then the pain shut down again. Ah, how regardlessly the earth pursued its way, the river went to meet the sea, the boats slipped downward, gently drawn and loitering along the lure ! Sweet eyes that through the western windows see every night over the broad shadowy stream the lamps build up their aerial bridge of light, could not detect this little spirit hovering to be gone, hidden among all the clustering glooms and summoning the powers of vasty death to do her will. She was all alone in the world ; God had forgotten her, — that was what Ruth kept saying to herself ; — a moment, and then sleep. As she said it, suddenly she seemed to feel a hand upon her shoulder. She turned hastily and

looked up ; there was nothing but the velvet violet heaven full of scattered starlight, the great immensity of clear and bending space. What wrung the scalding drops from her brain and dashed them impetuously down her cheek, gazing still with brimmed and blurring eyes ? How beautiful the hand ? Tender as beautiful ! God had never forgotten her ! He remembered her, he lifted her, he upheld her ; she was his little child, he loved her ! He had set her feet in that path,—let her cling to the hand and walk therein ! This pain was in the destiny of her nature belike, evaded here only to endure hereafter, in other worlds, sadder lives, till accomplished. Evade it, escape his will, escape fate,—she would not, if it were possible ; the old adoring worship overflowed her soul ; there might come barren sighs of ineffable human longing, but through all the years that should engulf those dreary instants henceforth the wide universe sufficed

her. Let her accept all suffering of his behest, all result of his laws, precious because his choice, welcome since sent by him. Let her live his life, her face upturned to catch his light, and dying leave some handful of his earth transmuted to heroic dust. It was all she could do for her Lord. And if he did more for her, if he drew her up higher and higher and into his heart through soaring eternities, let her wait, and, doing the Divine will, become fit for the Divine rest. It was all in a breath,—one of those swift miracles that happen every day, that sooner or later come to us all, and weld our wish with the Eternal Will. But as Ruth restored her gaze to the low dark horizon, how all Nature opened its depths to meet her! what sweetness lurked in the shadows! what brightness in the rays! She forgot sorrow, and it seemed as if the very heart were smiling within her. Her passion, her selfish ecstasy of pain, had passed; rest

took possession of her, and the warm still Indian summer night breathed its balm about her. A little wind blew up and ruffled all the idle bay as the two boats stole nearer ; it refreshed Ruth with great wafts, and soothed her brow ; it caught the dust of the thoroughfare, and whirled it in great clouds together. Suddenly the torch in the gay barge beyond, peopled with its invisible voices, flared into being again, and flung its restless light about, tossed up to the forgetful glance a sidelong dart from the chrysolite shining on her finger, lingered a moment on all the cool dew that lay beaded along the parapet flashing back innumerable twinkles and shattered sparks of color, then swept its gleam higher, and trembled over Ruth herself and on the great cloud impending there behind her,— and, suddenly, the slender boat on the hither side, drifting from its shadow, was caught back on a delaying oar while its master hung upon the rapt

bright gaze of that face above him. He remembered with the same heart-beat that old dream of which she had once told him, and it seemed to his transfixed fancy that the two upbearing angels stood behind her with their great arching pointed wings and glorious faces. To shoot down, secure his boat, climb and seek the spot, was but brief work,— yet vain. The place was vacant; he found nothing but the empty starlight and kind sheltering clouds of dust that perhaps hid the little phantom as it flitted on and away.

The day had been one of the fond mistakes of the year,— those dear surprises when all June seems filtering through November, when the landscape lies lapped in blue and mellow haze, and resin-breaths — sweeter than sighs from Sorrento's orange-groves — come floating everywhere tangled in the blissful air. Azarian had certainly intended to keep his

tardy promise to Ruth that noon, and then he bethought himself that no such delicious day for boating would the fall again afford,— so he went lightly simmering up the stream with the tide, found some woods in which to belate himself, gathered a rare medicinal root, watched a little sleepy fly, that all the season had not coaxed from its cell, just break the chrysalis, fall on his sleeve to spread and dry its gauzy wings and flutter along upon his way, pleased to see what kind of time the tiny prodigal was having on his first launch in life ; and when sunset burned among the tree-boles, found the dim bank and drifted down again. Now, as he rapidly left the bridge, and sought the old region, the solitary square, with its wildly flickering lamp, I cannot say what quick spasms of vague apprehension were these that stung him on. He reached Ruth's door,— it was open ; the place was dark. He entered, called her, waited, groped round and

found a candle. All was as she left it,— the very impression of her head upon the cushion, the spot where her breath had soiled the pane, the fire's dead remnants in the grate, his little Angelico hanging before her painting-desk, on her painting-desk the amaranth half sketched, and then those idle words. He bent and read them : “Till you need me, Azarian,— till you need me.” Azarian gave one long look about the room, and set down the candle, stood before it till, burning to the socket, it dipped and gasped for life and fell and left the place in blackness. Then he strode out, and locked the door behind him.

Meanwhile, if any watched the little vagrant woman wending under the shadow down the lonely windy way, none molested her. The slight form slid along the streets like a shadow itself. Weary, it waited a moment, leaning upon the stone pillar of a church. Down

through the portals came the heavenly song from the choir, that terzetto where the first voice floats forward on the great stream of the second, and underneath all the third tolls like a bell across a tranquil water, full of Sabbath rest,— Lift thine eyes. Then, when the beautiful silence had closed over it, she went on. Up and down long windy ways, looking only at her two clasped hands and on the single jewel there into which the light of all the lamps seemed to stoop and sparkle as she went.

At length she paused beside another door than that through which the radiant crowd were pouring, and waited till one should issue alone. The boy came tumbling down with his basket,— then a different form appeared, a firm foot stepped out, a white bare hand wrapped the cloak together and let it fall again in a moment's pause,— the soft breeze soothed so after all that reeking air, the stars

were so brilliant with heaven's own lustre after the glaring footlights, the great vault was so clear, so pure the cool night-fragrance, so grateful the silence. . The lofty glance fell downward then,— what little beggar was this slipping a hand in hers? Ruth did not look up.

- “Charmian,” she faltered, “I have come—”
The warm hand closed over the slender thing within it as if they were cut from one marble, and, still fast held, without a word, the two went on together.
-

Is it, when all is said, the lover or the love that one requires? Think of Goethe, and say the love. Think of any woman, and answer that it is the pulsating personality of the lover. But falling torn and bleeding, the arms of a true and strong affection, be it whose it

may, can support one till health of the heart returns. It is said, — *L'amour est à la portée de tout le monde : la seule épreuve d'un cœur d'élite est l'amitie.*

Perhaps it did not take the whole of those three foreign years for Charmian's embracing spirit to give tone and vigor to Ruth once more, to place her upon a fresh centre whence she could look with clearer eyes, to let her find herself full of such purified strength as that with which, after its igneous struggle, the diamond drops away from its char. Before the second year had expired, the sudden death of Madame Saratov left two orphans upon the world. Ruth saw a path before her with tears of thankfulness ; she made a swallow's flight across the Atlantic, and brought them both back to Charmian's hearth and hers, and took them into a heart wide enough to be a mother's. The boys stood a shield between her and the past ; gentle maternal duties ab-

sorbed her thought and her love; it needed constant care to overcome the vagrant life they lived and give it the wholesomeness of home; they began to interknit with closest fibres; she poured all the beautiful accumulations of her being into the young mould of theirs, and spared them none of the alchemized treasure of her experience. The brothers held Charmian in a sacred awe, and addressed her by the reverential surname; but the other one they worshipped and caressed, and called her always Ruth. Then all returned once more to the shores where first they had met one another, and, heart free and hand free in the service of unselfish love, Ruth soared on her art with wings she had not found before. She lived the life she coveted, she had her work, she had her bliss, these were her children.

Did one who, with a start, paused outside as he went down the hill in the wintry twi-

light, first glancing, then gazing, into the opposite windows of a drawing-room on the ground-floor, where the lights were lit and shutters still thoughtlessly unclosed, divine anything of this? Was that she, sitting in the ruby glow of the fire, his Ruth,—Ruth, who three years ago had gone forth into the night and left him? Ruth with such sunny light in her brown eyes, such soft rose-bloom on her cheek, such happy clinging smiles about the mouth he used to kiss? Ruth! Was it Paul Saratov too, the youth that stood with the mien of a young Norse hero, leaning on the back of her tall chair, and looking down with her at what the dark-eyed Ivan, seated at her feet on the other side, held up for her to see? These boys—had she set them in his empty shrine? Ah no, that chamber was sealed, and she was at peace. Was it Ruth with a mother's joys grafted upon her life? Well,—grafted? false then.

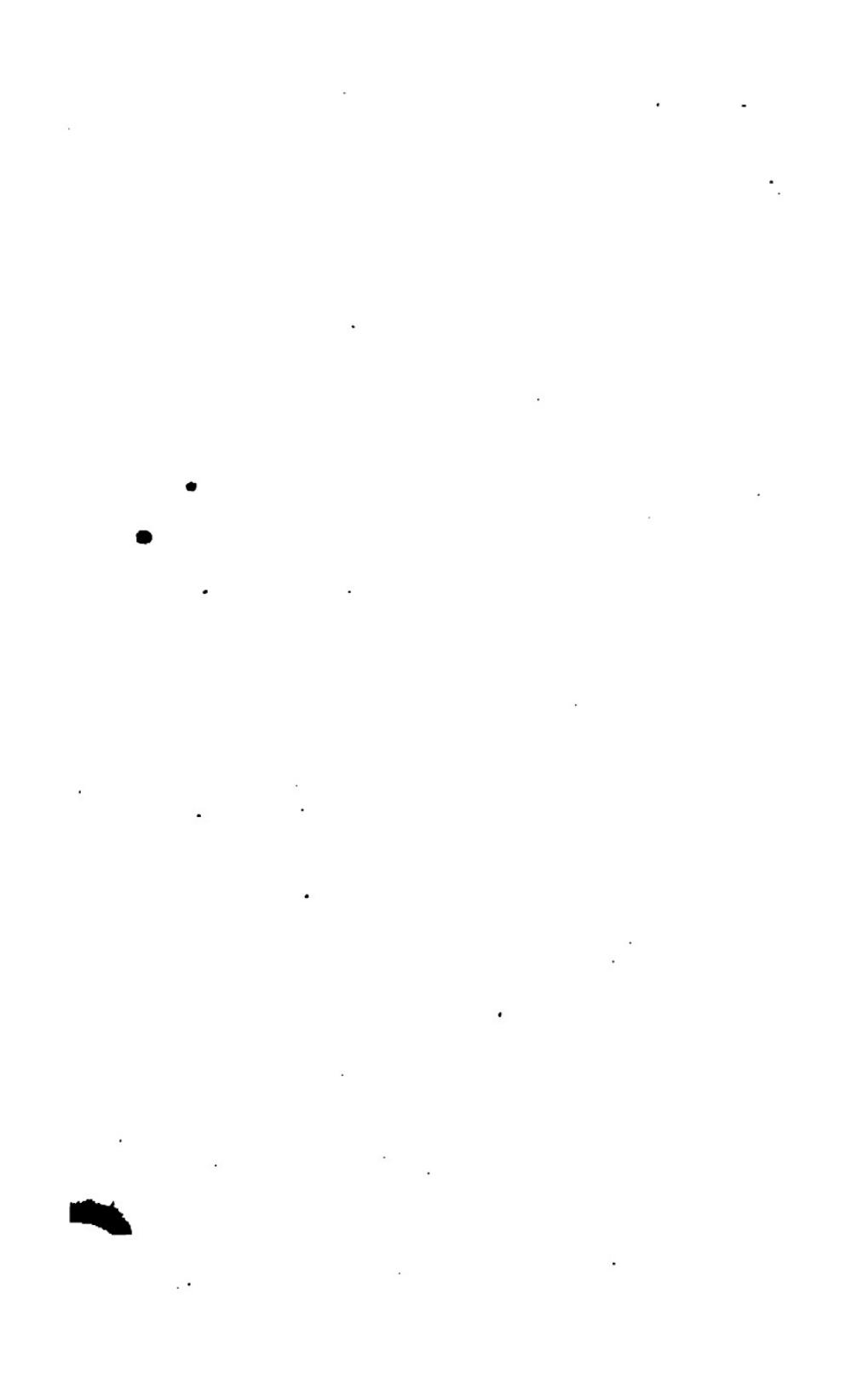
No, not so ; doubtless the stem loved best the fostering of the sunlight deep in its own heart, rejoiced most in the blossom of its own veins, but yet with the borrowed bud it bore good fruit. There was a deep and perfect serenity of gladness in that meeting of the three warm trusting glances before him there in the pleasant room, glances from faces full of love and peace.

As he gazed his bitter gaze, a stir of figures disturbed the air ; those happy sunshiny brown eyes were lifted and looking quietly at him. The night without, the light within, the pane between, made him viewless. She looked at him, and he was of less substance than any flitting film of the darkness. Then her fingers were stroking back Ivan's hair, and she was smiling up at Paul. Guests took their departure, a queenly woman with her purples gleaming beneath the golden drip of the chandeliers swept forward into his

range, put up a jewelled hand and dropped the shade.

“The curtain falls,” said Azarian, striding gloomily on his way alone, “the play is played out.”

THE END.





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JUNE, 1864.

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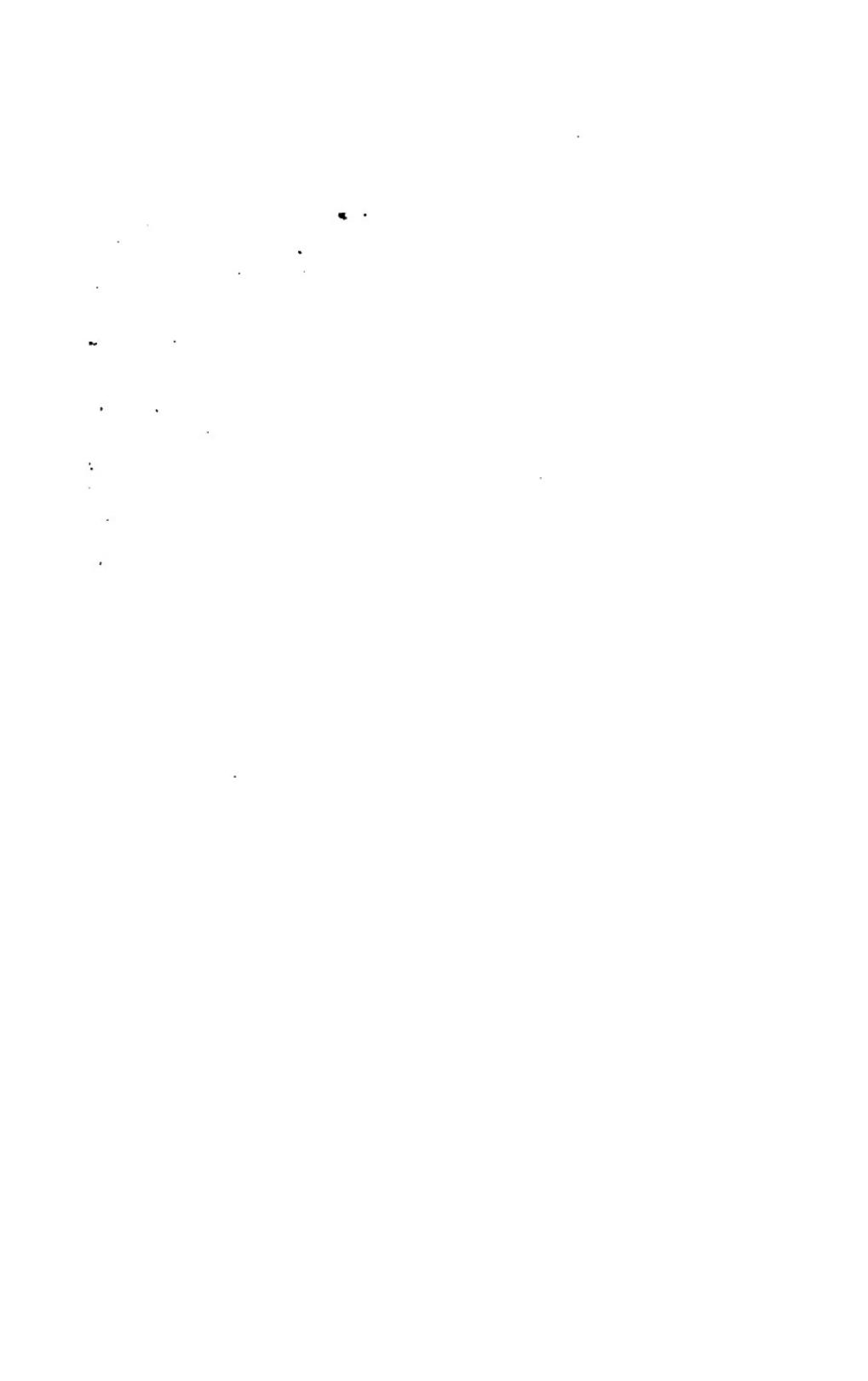
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